I. LAND USE REVIEW

A. PROFILE

The Land Use Review Division (LUR~~D~~) is the keystone or heart of Austin's development review process. Together with the Site and Subdivision Inspection Division, all new land development proposed in Austin must process through these two divisions for entitlement, detailed engineering plan approvals, and final construction. Concurrent review and approval of environmental regulations conformance is also conducted by LUR~~D~~. This "Gateway" for development in the city is critically important to both the quality and effective timely processing of new developments both large and small. It is a very large division staffed by specialists who focus on the myriad of city code regulations applicable to new development.

Authority

Chapters 25 and 30 of the City Code define the basic authority of this division for work in the city limits and the 5 mile Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) of Austin.

Organization

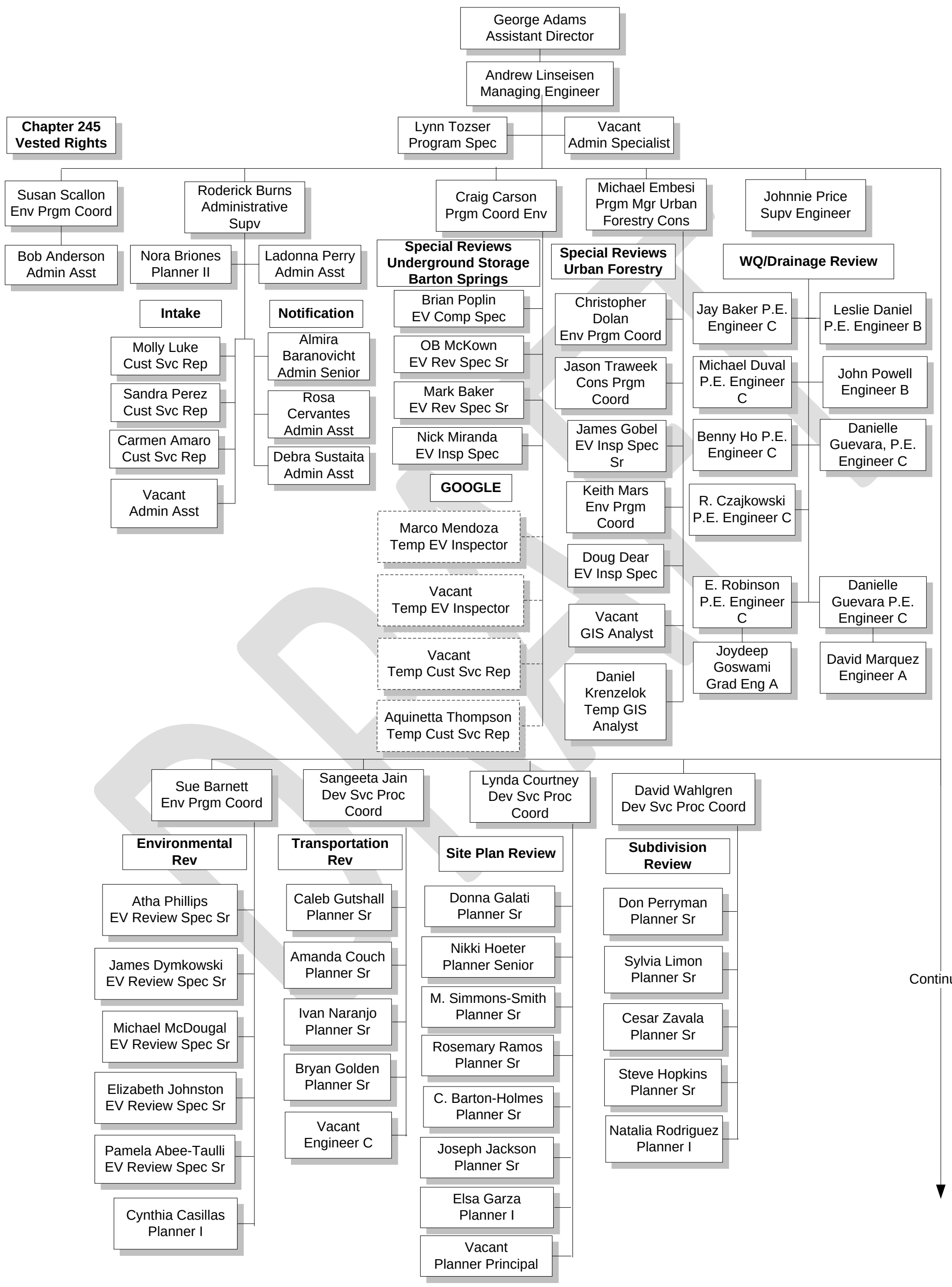
The organization of the Land Use Review Division is shown in Figure __, a list of employee positions and functions are shown in Table __. This Division is under new management with a new Managing Engineer and has been undergoing some internal reorganization. As such, the data in the Figure and Table may not be totally up to date.

Comment [MM1]: As mentioned on the phone, we feel this chapter needs a stronger overview as the other chapters, different organization and a substantial review of grammar and typos. We do not feel the profile section is a strong narrative for LUR. Our comments do not attempt to correct the noted deficiencies in this section, but focuses on major inaccuracies. We are providing a suggested outline.

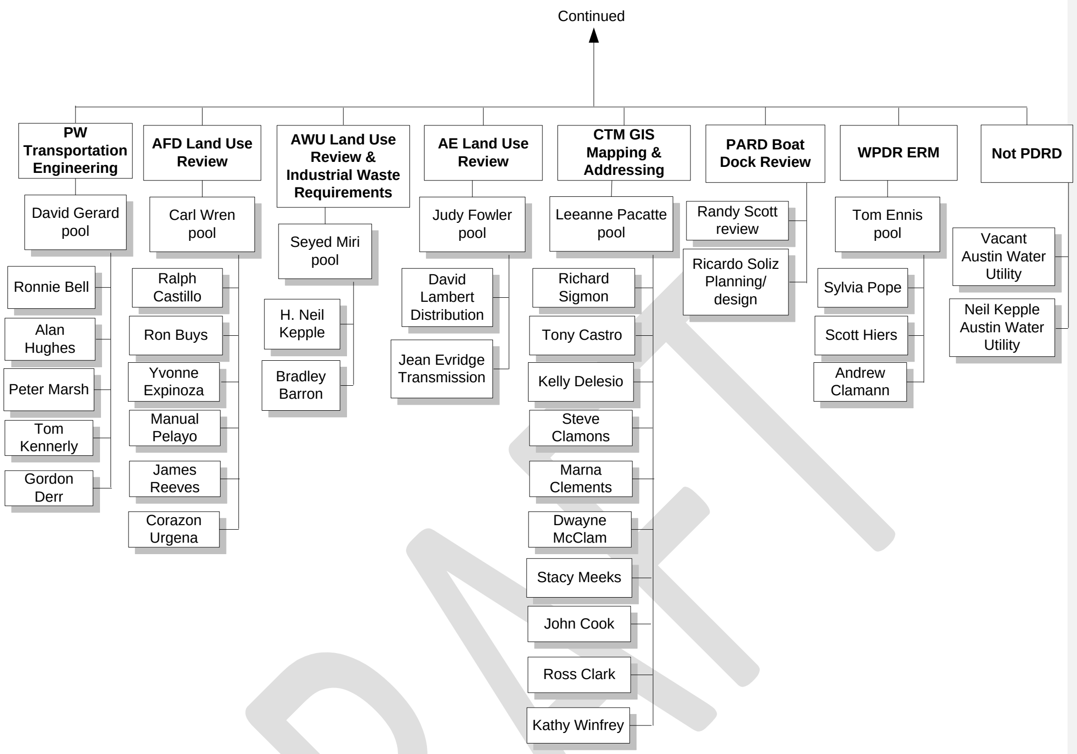
Comment [MM2]: There are other processes such as site plan exemptions, corrections, and residential review – that do not go through LUR.

Comment [AG3]: Other general comments: 1) To expand on the comments above the organization of this section does not assist the reader in understanding the structure of LUR. A Table of Contents might help illustrate this. We have provided a suggested outline but incorporating the text will likely require a significant effort. 2) There are multiple typos and incomplete sentences throughout the report. We have tried to highlight many of these but a thorough review should also be conducted by the author. 3) There is similar information presented in multiple locations throughout the document which both lengthens this section and can also confuse the reader as similar information is not always consistently presented. 4) There is a lot of focus in the Report on the Intake/Notification Sections. Discussion of this Intake/Notification occurs repeatedly throughout the first half of the report. We have noted this in many comments below. On the other end of the spectrum there is cursory discussion and recommendations on the Water Quality/Drainage, Environmental and Transportation Review Sections of LUR. 5) There is a lot of detailed documentation of various processes in the latter half of the report. While I'm sure some of this is needed as background it seems to have a lot of detail and adds substantially to the length of the report.

Figure 60
Land Use Review Division Organization



Comment [MM4]: Please use disclaimer on the org chart – it is now outdated. All of the individuals listed in the 2nd half (page 3) of the organizational chart are not responsible to PDRD. Note Carl Wren is listed in this list.



Staffing

Table 147
Staff Positions and Functions in Land Use Review Division

Position Title	Number of Positions	Responsibilities	Reports To
Assistant Director	1	Manages CodeNEXT, Current Planning, Development Assistance Center, and Land Use Review	Director
Managing Engineer	1	Manages the Land Use Review Division	Assistant Director
Program Spec	1	General support to the Division including coordinating SPOC, CAF and PIRs.	Managing Engineer
245 Program and Underground Storage			
Env Prgm Coord	1	Manages the 245 program and Underground Storage.	Managing Engineer

Position Title	Number of Positions	Responsibilities	Reports To
Admin Asst	1	Assist with the 245 program and Underground Storage.	Env Prgm Coord
Intake			
Administrative Supv/Customer Service	1	Supervises the operations and activities of personnel in the administration of city services (e.g., Intake and Notification), to assist customers in obtaining and maintaining services, and to educate and inform consumers.	Managing Engineer
Planner II	1	Carries out more complex professional planning work in the areas of zoning, and/or urban transportation design for the City.	Administrative Supv/Customer Service
Admin Asst	1	Works in conjunction with other administrative personnel to perform a wide variety of administrative support tasks for the Customer Service Supervisor.	Administrative Supv/Customer Service
Cust Svc Rep	3	Responsible for resolving inquiries from customers, contractors, and other city departments about services, products, billing, and equipment. Verifies customer account and active services using various databases and software applications. Researches customer account information to explain services, charges, and adjustments. Logs customer complaints, creates service requests, and routes to the appropriate department(s).	Administrative Supv/Customer Service
Google			
EV Insp Spec Senior, temporary	2	Handles google inspections.	Prgm Coord, Env
Cust Svc Rep, temporary	1	Responsible for researching customer questions, complaints, and billing inquiries. Leads and train others.	Administrative Supv/Customer Service
Cust Svc Rep, temporary	1	Responsible for resolving inquiries from customers, contractors, and other city departments about services, products, billing, and equipment. Verifies customer account and active services using various databases and software applications. Researches customer account information to explain services, charges, and adjustments. Logs customer complaints, creates service requests, and routes to the appropriate department(s).	Administrative Supv/Customer Service

Position Title	Number of Positions	Responsibilities	Reports To
Notification			
Admin Senior	1	Provides various routine administrative functions to departmental staff.	Administrative Supv/Customer Service
Admin Asst	3		Administrative Supv
Special Reviews (Underground Storage and Barton Springs)			
Prgm Coord, Env	1	Manages a Special Reviews section of PDRD that handles underground storage and the Barton Springs Zone operating permit program.	Managing Engineer
EV Comp Spec	1	Primarily handles the underground storage reviews and annual inspections	Prgm Coord, Env
EV Rev Spec Sr	2	Primarily handles Barton Springs operating permits.	Prgm Coord, Env
EV Insp Spec	1	Assists in inspections	Prgm Coord, Env
Special Reviews (Urban Forestry)			
Prgm Mgr. Urban Forestry	1	Manages, plans, develops, oversees conservation, preservation, and public tree forestry programs and the development and implementation of the City of Austin Urban Forestry Management Plan	Managing Engineer
Env Prgm Coord	2	Coordinates interdepartmental and interagency environmental and/or conservation programs or projects, serves as a liaison for interdepartmental and interagency issues, and coordinates and supports the activities of a division/section.	Prgm Mgr. Urban Forestry
Conservation Prgm Coord	1	Responsible for coordinating energy, water, or natural resource conservation programs, projects, and plans. Provides leadership; leads cross-functional and departmental conservation project teams; work assignments; evaluation; training; and guidance to others.	Prgm Mgr. Urban Forestry
EV Insp Spec Sr	1	Performs inspections and investigations of permitted land developments, construction sites and businesses to ensure compliance with environmental/engineering codes, ordinances and regulations. May provide leadership, work assignments, evaluation, training, and guidance to	Prgm Mgr. Urban Forestry

Comment [MM5]: Nothing listed in job responsibility?

Position Title	Number of Positions	Responsibilities	Reports To
		others.	
Env Prgm Coord	1	Coordinates interdepartmental and interagency environmental and/or conservation programs or projects, serves as a liaison for interdepartmental and interagency issues, and coordinates and supports the activities of a division/section for various projects and programs.	Prgm Mgr. Urban Forestry
EV Insp Spec	1	Perform inspections and investigations of permitted land developments, construction sites and businesses to ensure compliance with environmental/engineering codes, ordinances and regulations.	Prgm Mgr. Urban Forestry
Temp GIS Analyst	1	Under general supervision creates, maintains, displays and updates the GIS.	Prgm Mgr. Urban Forestry
WQ/Drainage Review			
Supv Engineer	1	Manages the Water Quality and Drainage Review Section	Managing Engineer
Engineer C	2	Supervises the Engineer A's and conducts water quality and drainage reviews.	Supv Engineer
Engineer C	4	Conducts water quality and drainage reviews.	
Engineer B	3	Conducts water quality and drainage reviews.	Supv Engineer
Engineer A	2	Conducts water quality and drainage reviews.	Supv Engineer
Environmental Rev.			
Env Prgm Coord	1	Manages Environmental Review section	Managing Engineer
EV Review Spec Sr	5	Reviews environmental aspects of Site Plans and Subdivisions.	Env Prgm Coord
Planner I	1	Team support for site plan case manager	Env Prgm Coord
Transportation Review			
Dev Svc Proc Coord	1	Manages Transportation Review section	Managing Engineer

Position Title	Number of Positions	Responsibilities	Reports To
Planner Senior	4	Reviews transportation aspects of Site Plans, Subdivisions, and Zoning	Dev Svc Proc Coord
Engineer C	1	Reviews transportation plans.	Dev Svc Proc Coord
Site Plan Review			
Dev Svc Proc Coord	1	Provides complex technical review and analysis to the development community, general public and City staff in order to ensure plans and specifications of proposed land development are in compliance with code requirements, ordinances and regulations. Responsible for supervisory activities.	Managing Engineer
Planner Senior	6	Carries out very complex urban planning duties for the City. Performs as Lead Case Manager. May coordinate the activities of other planners.	Dev Svc Proc Coord
Planner I	2	Responsible for assisting in planning tasks, such as researching preliminary data, and developing charts and graphs to accompany urban development plans or zoning changes.	Dev Svc Proc Coord
Subdivision Review			
Dev Svc Proc Coord	1	Provides complex technical review and analysis to the development community, general public and City staff in order to ensure plans and specifications of proposed land	Managing Engineer
Planner Senior	4	Carries out very complex urban planning duties for the City. Performs as Lead Case Manager. May coordinate the activities of other planners. Carries out very complex urban planning duties for the City. Performs as Lead Case Manager. May coordinate the activities of other planners.	Dev Svc Proc Coord
Planner 1	1	Reviews subdivisions.	Dev Svc Proc Coord
NOT PDRD			
PW Transportation Engineering	6		
AFD Land Use Review	7		

Position Title	Number of Positions	Responsibilities	Reports To
AWU Land Use Review & Industrial Waste	3		
CTM GIS Mapping & Addressing	11		
AE Land User Review	3		
PARD Boat Dock Review	2		
WPDR ERM	4		
Austin Water Utility	2		
TOTAL			

Annual Activity Levels

The activity levels for six years are shown in Table__.

Comment [MM6]: What is the relevance of this data – Needs an introduction and filled out?

Table 147
Land Use Review Division Six Year Activity Levels

Activity	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
Review Types							
Engineering Review							
Environmental Review					816		
Fire Review							
Land Use Review							
Transportation Review							
Travis County							
Tree Reviews	881	1535	2143	2794	2700		
Zoning Reviews							
Application Types							
Site Plans	439	413	425	415	502	530	
Subdivisions	184	219	217	267	315	367	

Activity	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
Review Types							
Underground storage					480		
Barton Springs permits					180		
Customer Assistance Forms					11		
Grandfather requests					250		
Public Information Requests					17		
Total Site Plan, Subdivision and Trees	1504	2167	2785	3476	3517		

B. Positive Findings

- Most relevant staff co-located in same building;
- The Land Use Manager, (Managing Engineer), is new and aware of many issues of deficiency to development process;
- Early stakeholder notice re site plans and subdivisions;
- Good data available for the City Arborist/Urban Forestry function;
- Staff participated well with efforts during this study; and
- The Manager of the Land Use Review division actively uses the reports available in AMANDA.

C. Organization Issues – All Functions

Administration

A Program Specialist directly reports to the Managing Engineer. The Managing Engineer believes additional administrative support is needed for the Division and during the course of this study was working to add an additional administrative position to the staff. The existing position handles a variety of functions including:

- **Customer Assistance Forms (CAFs)**
  These are customer requests that come from City Hall via the PDRD Director's Office ~~5th floor~~ and then are routed to the Land Use Review Division. Last year there were 11 forms processed. This function appears to work well. Note, there could be different dates used for this information as the PIO/Customer Service

Comment [MM7]: Does this topic take precedence over other high priority division functions?

Office who coordinates this process indicated referring 15 items in 2013 and 9 through October in 2014.

Comment [AG8]: Is this essential information for the reader?

- **Public Information Requests (PIRs)**
  PIRs relate to the State law that establishes the public information requests. There were 548 of these requests submitted to the Land Use Review Division last year. There is a nominal cost of 10 cents a page and $15 per hour to fulfill these requests. The $15 per hour cost would be substantially below the City's actual cost. This function looks for documents and does not include any substantive review. The Land Use Program specialists works with a Research Analyst Sr in the Support Services Division to coordinate PIR staff training. Some feel that, although requests are appropriate, some ~~citizens are abusing this function and the cost to comply substantially exceeds the revenue~~. This is an issue throughout PDRD. Many of these requests relate to underground storage tanks.

Comment [MM9]: Do you mean that some staff believe that the cost significantly exceeds the revenue.

1. ***Recommendation:* The City and the City Attorney should review the funding for PIRs and support, if necessary, legislation to increase the cost reimbursement.**

- **Legal Documents (SPOC)**

  This position tracks the legal documents related to Land Use Review functions including 437 such documents in 2013. Both staff and applicants complain that the legal review is often slow and in some cases lacks technical expertise. The LAW~~Legal~~ Department indicates that many issues relate to PDRD staff not providing the correct documents for review. We did review a PDRD tracking report for items submitted from 1/2/2014 to 7/21/2014 which listed 241 items with return dates of only 71. This included many items throughout this time period. While we were not able to conduct additional research on this item, it does appear that some attention to the issue would be appropriate.

2. ***Recommendation:* PDRD and the LAW~~egal~~ Department should meet to discuss timing issues, quality of requests, and quality of response issues re legal documents for Land Use.**

Comment [MM10]: Establish a stronger framework for this. "Meet" doesn't describe what really needs to occur.

Assistant Director

As discussed in Chapter __ of this report we suggest that the Assistant Director who handles the Land Use Review Division also handle the Site/Subdivision Inspection Division.

Comment [MM11]: Why is this mentioned here in the chapter – what is the relevance? There are no associated recommendations?

Data Collection/Reporting

Data that was requested as part of our study was not readily available and had to be manually collected. For example, various data on Intake/Notification activity was not available through AMANDA or other reporting methods. Staff had to obtain year-to-date data from various sources and count it manually, which is inefficient and time

consuming. Staff indicated that currently, they are not able to use the AMANDA system for reporting, due to configuration issues.
The collection and analysis of activity data at regular intervals is a critically important tool for managers because it helps them understand past and current activity trends, set appropriate staffing levels based on activity, and monitor timelines. At a minimum, this function should collect and report on data for the following activities:

- The monthly/annual number of walk-in customers served by Intake staff;
- The monthly/annual number of phone calls handled by Intake staff;
- The monthly/annual number of applications submitted to Intake;
- The monthly/annual number of notifications completed.

Comment [MM12]: This activity already tracked.

Comment [MM13]: This activity already tracked

3. ***Recommendation:*** **The Administrative Supervisor should work with CTM to configure AMANDA to collect and report on data for the Intake/Notification Function.**

Management

Comment [AG14]: Of the Intake/Notification Section? Of LUR?

There was substantial evidence that there were major management issues for this Division over the past six years. The management of the department has been too slow in addressing these issues. The new Managing Engineer comes from the private sector and appears to be making good progress on addressing a variety of issues. There is a monthly Division staff meeting which is a good practice.

Comment [MM15]: Please be specific. Who are you referencing?

The Managing Engineer has 9 direct reports plus a Program Specialist and an Administrative Specialist resulting in a total of 11 direct reports. While the number of direct reports has increased in contemporary organizations, 11 direct reports appears to be too large for these sophisticated and technical functions. An Administrative Specialist position was recently added (currently vacant) which can help the situation. Nevertheless, we believe the span of control for the Managing Engineer is too great. Alternative solutions include adding an Assistant Managing Engineer for the entire Division, or merging one or more sections to reduce the number of direct reports. Additional analysis and discussion within the Division will be required to make this decision.

4. ***Recommendation:*** **The Managing Engineer and section managers and supervisors should hold a series of meetings to discuss how to best address the Managing Engineers span of control issue.**

Meetings/Communication/Team Work

Separate, reoccurring bi-weekly meetings are held with both the Intake staff and Notification staff in an effort to improve consistency and coordination, which is good. A monthly meeting is also held between the Supervisor and all staff to identify discuss and resolve issues and share Division and Department-wide information. Our interviews

Comment [MM16]: Virtually every section in LUR has bi-weekly meetings, but you only mention intake and notification? Why?

indicated that the new Supervisor recently instituted these meetings, so staff is still reporting a need for improved teamwork and coordination and consistency in the application of procedures. To help further structure and focus staff meetings, we recommend:

- All reoccurring meetings held with the function should have a defined purpose, an agenda, action items and summary notes that can be distributed electronically to all staff in advance of and following the meeting whether in attendance or not;
- The Manager should include a scheduled time in each meeting to discuss the mission and direction of the function as related to processing activities and service delivery;
- A minimum of 30 minutes of each meeting agenda should be devoted to procedural training to improve processing consistency and expertise among staff; and
- One meeting per month an agenda item should be included for a team-building exercise to strengthen trust and rapport among supervisors and staff and help improve morale.

5. ***Recommendation:*** **Revise content and approach to Land Use meetings as outlined above.**

Comment [MM17]: Is this related to intake and notification section or LUR as a whole?

Office Space

Comment [MM18]: You only reference intake staff, but do not mention the needs of LUR as a whole

Staff reported and we observed cramped workspaces for Intake staff that contain insufficient table space for plan review. The city is transitioning to a paperless electronic submittal and plan review system, which will significantly improve ~~largely eliminate~~ this issue.

Also see our recommendation to relocate Intake staff to the front reception area, which should be reconfigured to appropriately accommodate Intake staff workstations.

Other Departments

Comment [MM19]: Needs stronger intro – such as - PDRD coordinates with other departments in the administration of the development review and permitting process and this is common all municipalities…

There is considerable confusion between the responsibilities and functions of PDRD and the related departments. There are four aspects to this relationship including:

1. Setting the Standards (Land Use Code and Rules);
2. Reviewing and Approving Plans; and
3. Field Inspection
4. Operation of Functions

One approach to this issue would be to simply have PDRD responsible for all ~~three~~ four aspects. This approach is used in some best practices communities. However, this could be extremely difficult in a complex City like Austin. For Austin we suggest the operating departments continue to set the standards but they delegate all reviews and inspection function to PDRD. The other departments would, of course, continue to be responsible for operations. MOU's will be needed to accomplish this and it may result in some staff from other departments being transferred to PDRD. The approach is illustrated in Figure __.

Figure 136
Organization of Standards, Reviews, and Inspections

Standards	Reviewers	Inspections	Operations
Operating Departments	PDRD	PDRD	Operating Departments

Standards: The setting of the standards should be a key responsibility of the operating departments. However, if standards are out of date, there is no practical way for a reviewing function to do a competent and consistent review. Austin does have a complex Rules setting procedure that allows all functions to comment on and participate in Rules proposed by any operating department. We were not in a position to review all the Rules but based on interviews and questionnaires, it appears some of the Rules need up-dating. The CodeNEXT project will also likely have a major impact on the Rules. We suggest that the operating departments have responsibility for the Rules and they should agree to any needed up-dates to be completed within three months.

Comment [MM[20]: 3 months is not adequate time given the current rules processes.

~~As suggested in one staff questionnaire, "The standards are not current. There is a lot of City Maintained infrastructure being built with standards." The Austin Transportation Department has changed their idea of the definition of a street, thus the geometry tables and limits, but has not updated their Criteria Manual and every project requires waivers from them~~.

See Recommendation __ where we indicate the operating departments should be responsible for the construction standards (Rules) and Recommendation __ requiring all rules to be updated.

Comment [MM[21]: As mentioned in previous chapters, please include cross-references so readers can compare and understand.

Reviews: The application reviews and approvals should all be consolidated within PDRD. The external departments would no longer review projects except for a few isolated incidence's that could be specified in MOU's. The MOU's will also address the topics of staff and funding. While the external departments would continue to fund the reviews, some of their staff that currently are conducting reviews should be transferred to PDRD. A typical type of MOU we have used elsewhere is shown in Appendix __.

Part of the problem was created when the functions of Watershed Protection and the Planning Development Review Department were split to create ~~in~~ two departments. The Land ~~Environmental~~ Development ~~Review~~ Code mentions two different directors. Evidently there has been discussion of an MOU to clarify this but it has not progressed.

See Recommendation __ suggesting that all plan reviews and approvals should be consolidated within PDRD and memorialized in MOU's. Recommendation__ indicates that staff currently doing plan review in operating departments be transferred to PDRD as needed.

Comment [MM[22]: Cross-reference

Field Inspection: Field inspection would remain in PDRD similar to the current arrangement. This is further clarified in the recommended MOU's that are developed during the "Partnering" process as described and recommended in Chapter XI (SSI) of this report.

Operations: Operations would continue in the operating departments as currently practiced.

Formatted: Font: Bold, Underline

Policy and Procedures /Training Manual

This function has a Training Manual for Staff. However, portions of the Manual are outdated and as such it can't be relied upon as a reference guide. In addition, the Manual does not provide sufficient detail for some tasks to serve as a Training Manual and really serves more as a reference guide. We reviewed the Manual and were able to confirm that portions are outdated and it lacks detailed instruction necessary to serve as a Training Manual. The training manual should provide step-by-step instructions including a uniform and searchable format and revision blocks that can be used as a tool to uniformly administer policies and procedures.

Comment [MM[23]: Which function? LUR, Site and Sub, Drainage Quality – be specific.

Staff also reported that they do not receive sufficient notice of policy and procedure changes, and that policies are not uniformly enforced, which causes frustration and hinders efficiency.

6. ***Recommendation:*** **The Administrative Supervisor should update the Training Manual.**

Comment [AG24]: Is this referring to the Admin Supervisor of Intake? The text above does not make this clear.

Comment [MM[25]: Which manual? There isn't a single manual for LUR. Each section has its own. Be specific.

7. ***Recommendation:*** **Policy and procedural changes should be formally discussed and announced to all staff in advance of implementation.**

Staffing

Staff reported that activity levels are up and workload demands are getting more difficult to meet. It was also reported that Intake staffing (e.g., Customer Service Representative) is insufficient in this function. Data provided by management staff showed that 21,904 applications have been submitted year-to-date as shown in Table ___.

Comment [MM[26]: What about other sections within LUR?

Table ___
Intake Data

Application Type	Number
Completeness Check Applications	1,431
General Permit Applications	496
Site Plan Applications	530
Subdivision Applications	367
Tree Review Applications	19,080
Total	**21,904**

Annual submittal data for the previous 5-years was not readily available, so we could not confirm the rate of increase in activity levels. However, annual data provided by other functions shows that activity levels have generally increased as shown in Table __ the 4 year average for Site Plan, Subdivision and Tree Permits was 2,483. The same categories for 2013 included 3,517 or a 41% increase in activity.

Comment [MM[27]: That data is available. Why was it not readily available?

Comment [MM[28]: Where is this Table??

Comment [MM[29]: What is the relevance of focusing on tree permits? What does this tell the reader?

Comment [ZS30]: seems like a big increase, does this lead us to another recommendation?

Staffing levels for the function have been relatively constant over the last several years. Currently, the function consists of 9 FTE's, including a Supervisor. Recently 1 FTE (Planner II) was transferred to the Special Review/Arborist Program to assist with their administrative needs. This position was largely performing more routine reception duties and management staff believed the position would provide greater benefit handling administrative tasks for the Special Review/City Arborist function. There is also 2 temporary staff in the function, which are dedicated to the City's "Google" project.

Comment [MM[31]: Which function?

The function is generally responsible for taking in new and resubmitted applications and permits, resolving inquiries from customers, contractors, and other city departments, verifying and researching customer accounts, explaining services, charges, and adjustments, providing notification of new applications and hearings and distributing application packets/meeting materials for review.

Our interviews indicated that staff is able to complete their work tasks within designated work hours. However, management staff stated that new application submittal appointments are backlogged by nearly 1 week. Given the overall desire to shorten timelines, this backlog is not acceptable. After observing the Intake process, we believe that the backlog is likely the result of the labor-intensive Intake process, which takes about 45 minutes to complete, and limits new submittal appointments to 6 per week. We noted under the "Applications," Process Issues," "Policy & Procedures," and "Technology," and Training," headings of the Land Use Review section of this report, that AMANDA~~manda~~ configuration issues, outdated submittal checklists, training, cross-training and procedural deficiencies have coalesced to hinder efficiency in this function.

Comment [MM[32]: Please verify your data source, because we do not believe this is accurate.

As a result, staff has to engage in elaborate manual crosschecking efforts and "work-arounds" in order to complete tasks, which slows the Intake (Customer Service Representatives) and Notification processes.

If these issues are resolved as recommended, they will likely eliminate the backlog in formal submittal Intake activities. Additionally, electronic submittal, review and payment is on the horizon and implementation is underway, which will further improve efficiency. As such, we do not believe additional permanent Intake (Customer Service Representatives) staff are needed at this time. However, to correct current backlog, we recommend adding 1 temporary customer service representative.

8. ***Recommendation*: Add one temporary customer service representative.**

Comment [MM33]: Are there any other staff needs for LUR? Is the temporary customer service representative for the Intake Section? Please clarify. Report is too narrowly focused on Intake and Notice with little information on other sections!

9. ***Recommendation:* The Supervisor should create a staffing model for the Intake and Notification function using application labor hours derived from the PDRD fee study to conduct a staffing analysis to determine appropriate staffing levels, if activity volumes significantly increase to justify the need for additional staff.**

Comment [MM34]: Please clarify and simplify. It is very difficult to understand what you mean. Provide formula and /or example if that is what your are referencing.

Staff Turnover

The staff turnover for the Land Use Review Division is shown in Table __. As a rule of thumb we suggest that turnover under 10% may be acceptable but once over 10% it is a sign of problems. As can be seen in Table __. The Land Use Review Division had a high turnover is 2011-12 of 12.28%. While not exceptionally high, the three years from 2010 to 2013 resulted in a fourth of the staff being new. This is particularly critical in Austin because of the complex codes and rules resulting in long staff training times. The Division should carefully monitor turnover in the next two years. It would be important to monitor this section by section.

10. ***Recommendation:* The Land Use Review Division and PDRD's HR function should carefully monitor staff turnover for the Land Use Review Division.**

Comment [MM35]: Would be beneficial identify why the turnover rate may be high and what could be done to reduce it

Table __
Staff Turnover, Land Use Review Division

Division	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Land Use Review	5.17	12.28	5.17	

Comment [MM36]: Are these in % If so, please list in table heading

Staffing

The six year staffing for the Land Development Division is shown in Table __.

Table 156
Land Use Review Division Staffing

Activity	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
Land Use Review			66	62	62	65	

Comment [MM[37]: Please check for 2009 and 2010 data.

Technology

Technology for the Department as a whole is discussed under a separate chapter in this study. However, Intake/Notification staff interviews indicated that there are some technological issues that chronically hinder efficiency, including the following:

Comment [MM[38]: What about other sections within the division? Outside of Intake and Notification?

- Inability to pay online;
- AMANDA review date configuration issues (e.g., dates are calculated; incorrectly), reviewer selection issues (e.g., incorrect reviewers are often designated) and fee calculation errors, which requires staff to undertake manual data entry, exhaustive cross-checks, and "work-arounds;"
- The Customer Wait System (CWS) is limited (e.g., doesn't provide details about service needs, doesn't capture City Arborist walk-in customers, etc.); and
- AMANDA's lack of reporting capabilities.

Comment [MM[39]: Does this statement align with what was mentioned in the Technology chapter. We believe in the Technology chapter it was mentioned that AMANDA had good reporting capabilities.

Staff suggested that a computer Kiosk be placed in the reception area to allow City Arborist customers to sign in through the CWS and be placed in a queue for assistance by the "on-call" City Arborist staff person, rather than relying on reception staff. We believe this is an alternative that the City should explore, in its efforts to improve customer service in the Land Use Division.

As mentioned under the "Process Issues" heading of this section, staff is currently working to configure AMANDA to allow for online payment and electronic submittal.

11. ***Recommendation:*** **Confirm the existence of specific AMANDA configuration issues that were reported and initiate correction of these issues through CTM as soon as possible.**

12. ***Recommendation:*** **Explore whether the CWS can be modified to include City Arborist walk-in customers to facilitate more efficient customer service.**

Training

Training for the Land Use Review division is shown in Table __. While this data is impressive, we still received major feedback from customers criticizing the lack of staff expertise within the Land Use Review Division. In the Support Services Chapter of this report we discuss overall training within PDRD. For the current year, we suggest the PDRD training budget be increased by $200,000.

Table
Training Performance Measures Land Use Review

One Stop Shop	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Effectiveness rating of training sessions	No data	81%	85%	85%	
# training sessions held	9	8	10	10	

Comment [AG40]: Internal training is separate from the externally focused public training sessions.

Comment [MM[41]: The section above is about internal training, but believe this table reflects external trainings for citizens, etc.

Staff in this function reported that there is a need for additional supervisory training in this function, as the Supervisor is new, decision-making is inconsistent and the systems/processes need review, analysis and improvement so that they are more efficient.

In addition, Intake staff should receive on-going training on the AMANDA system to limit “work-arounds” and ensure that all staff are equally proficient operating the system.

Focus groups, interviewers and our observations suggest an immediate need for customer service training, particularly with regard to customer-facing staff (e.g., reception). Cross-training between Intake, Distribution and Notification Staff is also needed to provide back up and job interest and raise overall competency levels. On-going training is also needed on new policies and procedures and the roles and responsibilities of other functions in the Division and/or other Divisions within the PDRD. As indicated in other parts of this report, we recommend 2% of the personnel budget and 5% of the staff time for training. Elsewhere in the report we also recommend supervisory and leadership training for managers and supervisors.

13. ***Recommendation:*** **The Supervisor should conduct internal training sessions with staff on process to raise competency levels and processing consistency.**

Comment [MM[42]: Which supervisor?

14. ***Recommendation:*** **The Supervisor should identify training needs related to customer service and the AMANDA system and schedule training accordingly.**

Comment [MM[43]: Which supervisor?

15. ***Recommendation:*** **Staff should be cross-trained to provide back up, job interest and raise over all competency levels.**

See our recommendations under the “Meetings/Communication/Teamwork” heading concerning devoting time at each meeting to training.

Comment [MM[44]: Cross-reference

Travis County

There is confusion amongst some of the staff concerning the relation between Travis County and PDRD.

16. ***Recommendation:*** **The Land Use Review Division Manager should prepare ~~a~~ descriptions and SOP concerning Division responsibilities' related to Travis County.**

Wait Times, Intake

The wait times for the Land Use Review Division intake is shown in Table __. In general, the data shows a well operating intake. We do have a few suggestions as follows and as suggested in other parts of this study:

- The use of averages can be very misleading. If they are used at all either a high and low number should be shown, or data should have a variety of information in a table. A better approach is to simply set a performance standard (15 minutes) and indicate the percent that has been completed in the 15 minutes.
- We suggest the performance standard be set at 15 minutes and the target for performance should be 90 or 95% vs the actual of 84%.
- Without more detailed analysis, it is hard to comment on the service times. If the average is 58 minutes, setting a service time of 20 minutes is likely not reasonable.

Table
Counter Wait and Assist Times August 2014

Counter	# Walk In Customers	Average Wait Times	Average Assist Times	Percent Wait Times 20 Minutes or Less	Percent Service Times 20 Minutes or Less	Percent One Hour or Longer
Land Use Intake	643	00:10	00:58	84%	39%	1%

D. Organization Issues – Specialization Land Use Division Sections

Environmental Review

This primary environmental review function analyses watersheds, landscape, erosion control, and habitats. For review purposes, the City has been divided into watersheds. A

Comment [MM45]: Needs an introduction describing where the City and the County interact and have overlapping responsibility. ..

Comment [MM46]: What about other sections within LUR?

Comment [MM47]: Are these bullet points recommendations or something different? Please clarify

Comment [MM48]: Please spell out job title throughout document staff of 7 include geologist, arborist, and landscape architects. The section is headed by and Env. Prgm Coord. Reviews are conducted for site plans, subdivisions and zoning.

Comment [MM[49]: Please rewrite to make it clear.

Meetings are held every Wednesday with the Attorney's office to discuss environmental issues. There has been a difference of opinion concerning a number of issues such as using notes on plats at not. The attorneys are concerned about the ability to both enforce conditions and any possible future changes. Some staff feel that the attorneys tend to want to direct policy rather than simply provide council to the staff. Staff also feel that often the attorneys are slow. On the other hand the attorneys feel that some of the work they are asked to review is not complete. In any case, it is essential that PDRD and the Legal Department function as a team.

Comment [AG50]: Comment from Greg Guernsey – This appears to be disclosing Attorney-Client privileged information.

17. ***Recommendation:* The PDRD Managing Engineer, Assistant Director, and the Env Prgm Coord should meet with the City Attorney and appropriate attorneys to solve coordination issues.**

Comment [AG51]: Please spell out throughout document

Environmental Review used to be the responsibility of reviewers in the Watershed Department and there is an Environmental Officer in Watershed that may have some statutory responsibility. However, we believe, as previously discussed that all reviews should be within PDRD. Other departments should no longer be involved in reviews. This should be memorialized through the use of MOU's.

The Env Prgm Coord is also taking a lead with CodeNEXT re environmental issues. Given the City's concern about environmental issues, this is a key assignment.

Comment [AG52]: Please spell out

There may be a shortage of administrative support for this function but we were not able to analyze this in detail. However, the Managing Engineer has been looking at administrative needs in the entire Division and this could be included in his analysis.

Comment [AG53]: Why not?

There were 816 review cases for this section last year. This would result in 15.7 cases per month or for six reviewers 2.6 cases per week per reviewer. Some cases cycle more than one time. The manager of the section indicates the likely need for two more staff. There may have been high turnover however, we did not have that level of turnover data. There may be a need to examine the pay level for this staff which would be included in a pay and classification study for all of PDRD. Austin environmental regulations are so complex that some feel it takes new staff up to three years to be totally competent.

18. ***Recommendation:* A detailed staffing analysis should be conducted competitive salaries, and staffing levels, career advancement plans.**

Comment [AG54]: Incomplete sentence

Grandfathering (Chapter 245)

State Law establishes specific rules for Grandfathering projects based on prior approvals. This work is handled by an Env. Prgm. Coordinator who reports directly to the Managing Engineer. There is a fee of $840 for this review. An Admin Asst support the Env Prgm Coord. Last year there were 250 grandfathering requests. There are two or three court

Comment [AG55]: Please spell out throughout cases per year. The City prevails in some of the cases and the applicant in others. A team ~~committee~~ meets privately for roughly an hour and a half twice a week to review grandfather requests. The team~~committee~~ includes the PDRD Director, up to two City attorneys, a Watershed Department representative and two staff from the Land Use Review Division. The approach to Grandfathering is an interpretation of State law and City ordinance~~ policy/political decision~~ and in general the City appears to take a conservative approach to the topic, i.e. leans toward not approving Grandfathering.

Comment [AG56]: Comment from Greg Guernsey: need to provide statistics on cases approved/denied. I believe this is not correct and more are approved than denied.

The City's law suite history since 2009 includes:

Comment [AG57]: Suit. Is this essential information?

- 3 Settlement Cases
- 1 Loss at appellate court $89,500
- 1 Nonsuit
- 5 Open cases
- 1 Order if dismissal

Some consideration should be given to the membership of the Grandfathering team~~committee~~. We have commented elsewhere in this report for the need for the PDRD Director to spend more time on management and leadership needs and do less micro managing. As such, we believe he should delegate his role on the Grandfathering team~~committee~~.

earSpecial Reviews (Underground Storage, Barton Springs, General Permits)

Comment [AG58]: ????

A five staff in this section handle a variety of special reviews including:

- **Underground Storage**
  The City has 480 underground storage facilities and these are inspected annually.
- **Barton Springs**
  There are roughly 180 operating permits per year for the Baron Springs Zone area. This program includes water quality in ponds.
- **General Permit Program**
  The General Permit Program handles permits for other City departments and utility companies.

Comment [AG59]: typo

We did not receive or uncover any specific problems with these programs. However, it was suggested that there may be some benefit of having the Barton Springs program moved to the Environmental Section of the Site/Subdivision Division of PDRD.

19. ***Recommendation:*** **the Managing Engineer and the Division Manager Construction Inspection should discuss the appropriate organizational location for the Barton Springs operating permits.**

20. ***Recommendation:* Determine that the total cost to service the General Permit Program including field inspections is sufficiently offset by franchise fees.**

Comment [BM60]: Added by GBM

Transportation Review Section

Four planners handle transportation reviews.

Comment [AG61]: 5 including the manager of the section

Qualifications: The transportation review do not appear to carry the transportation degrees or specialization that we would normally see for this function. The official job descriptions are the same as for all planners. We did note the lack of a Transportation Engineer in this function and the Managing Engineer is looking into adding such a position.

21. ***Recommendation:* A Transportation Engineer should be added to the Transportation Section.**

22. ***Recommendation:* The job specifications and job descriptions should be reviewed for the Planner Seniors in the Transportation Review Section**

Staffing: Last year there were 502 site plans, 315 subdivisions, and 140 zoning cases reviewed for a total of 957. With 4 reviewers this would amount to an average of 229 cases each or 4.6 per week, roughly 1 per day. The review statistics prepared by the Managing Engineer indicate 1,621 transportation reviews last year. Compared with the 957 cases reviewed, this would indicate on the average 1.7 reviews per case. If this data is accurate, this would be good performance. However, there is some question about the accuracy of data from the PDRD data system. Staff indicates it is more likely that the average review per case is 3 cycles. The statistics show that Transportation Review meet the application deadlines 92.8% of the time which is good. However, the AMANDA deadlines is only met 66.3% of the time. This gives the overall staff coordinating site plan and subdivision reviews from multiple specialist less time to integrate comments. The transportation manager should work with staff to meet the AMANDA deadlines at least 90% of the time.

23. ***Recommendation:* The Transportation Manager should work with staff to determine how to best meet the AMANDA deadlines at least 90% of the time.**

Staff also work on requests from the City Council such as:

- Allowing metered parking on City streets as part of the parking requirements
- Parking reductions in relation to transit
- Fees in-lue of ADA parking requirements

Comment [AG62]: lieu

Depending on the job qualifications review and the addition of a Transportation Engineer, there still could be a need for one more planner.

24. ***Recommendation:*** **The staffing levels for the Transportation Review Section should be reviewed following the job specifications review.**

Comment [AG63]: What is the job specifications review?

The Transportation Review Section holds weekly section staff meetings. Some of the Austin Transportation Department staff come to this meeting and the PDRD transportation manager goes to the Transportation Department meetings. There are also some meeting exchange with the Public Works Department. Although communication between the three departments is useful and should be encouraged, it should be clear that the responsibility for review should be with the PDRD staff and applicants should not need to work with either the Transportation Department or the Public Works Department. There has been some confusion on this in the past.

Comment [AG64]: Incomplete sentence

See earlier Recommendation indicating that all plan reviews should be consolidated within PDRD.

Traffic Impact Analysis is required for some projects. Some staff suggest that these only address a limited amount of the problem and the City would be better off using a more comprehensive Traffic Impact Fees. While this is an approach used by many communities, it is a key policy/political issues outside the scope of this study.

Water Quality/Drainage Reviews

An 11 person division headed by a Supervising Engineer handles water quality and drainage reviews. Staff consists of Engineers A, B, and Cs. The section holds weekly meetings to go over technical issues which is good. Functions include:

- Review of subdivisions and site plans;
- Occasional reviews or zoning;
- Easement releases;
- License agreements for use of right-of-way;
- Flood plain issues for building permits; and
- Support for DAC when the DAC engineer is out of the office.

Comment [AG65]: of

The Supervising Engineer on the organization chart has 10 direct reports. However, the two Engineer A's actually report to an Engineer C which brings the direct reports down to 8. In contemporary organizations this should be manageable but could still be considered too many. The Supervising Engineer should be cautious to not micro manage operational reviews and the leave sufficient time for supervision and management functions.

Comment [AG66]: delete the

25. ***Recommendation:*** **The Supervising Engineer should review and possibly increase the delegation of operational functions.**

The standards for this function appear to come from a combination of responsibilities from PDRD, Public Works, and the Watershed Protection Department. Additionally, there appears to be some overlap of review functions between these three departments. Also, the construction and other standards may not be totally up to date. We suggest that standards be kept up to date and be the primary responsibility of either Public Works or Watershed or a combination of the two. However, application reviews and inspection should be the sole responsibility of PDRD. This split of functions should be memorialized by an MOU as discussed in Chapter __ of this report. Evidently there has been an MOU underway for many years trying to define the roles but this has never been completed.

There should be a close relation between the engineer located in DAC and the Land Use Review Division engineers. One option would be to have the DAC engineer report to Land Use but be located and function within DAC.

26. ***Recommendation:*** **The Managing Engineer of Land Use Review and Manager of Development Assistance Services and the Assistant Director should meet to discuss the appropriate reporting relations for the Engineer B located within DAC.**

E. PROCESS ISSUES – LAND USE DIVISION

Comment [AG67]: Comment from Greg Guernsey: This section should be moved earlier in the report.

Comprehensive Reviews

The applicants have three primary complaints. First the overall reviews take too long. Secondly, reviews are not comprehensive, lack consistency, and new items keep getting added as reviews take place. Third, staff tends to "nit-pick" on items that are not significant to meeting the codes of the quality of the project. Standards have been set for most reviews and with a few exceptions, review times are being met. However, many of the reviews are not comprehensive which leads to too many multiple review cycles. We suggest:

Comment [AG68]: I'm not sure our customers would agree with this.

1. The Completeness Check should be sufficient enough to allow staff to perform a comprehensive first review;
2. Staff should be trained and managed to provide a comprehensive first review;
3. Supervisors and managers should audit a percentage of first reviews to assure that staff is not asking for "nit picking" items; and
4. Supervisors and managers should audit a percentage of second and third reviews to assure that new items are not being added in subsequent reviews.

27. ***Recommendation:*** **The application review process should follow the four items outlined above.**

Performance Measures/Standards

The Performance Standards being used for the Land Development Division are shown in Table 85 along with our suggested changes. The performance review times for the Land Use Review Division are set up in the AMANDA system. The first review is due to the applicant in 28 days. The individual disciplines have 21 days for their review and the case manager has another 7 days to prepare a report and meet the 28 day deadline. For subsequent reviews the deadline is 7 days for staff review and 14 days to the applicant. In general, these are reasonable deadlines. However, we suggest the deadline for third and subsequent reviews be set at 4 days for the staff and 7 days to the applicant.

Comment [AG69]: Review times are established in the Land Development Code and reflected in AMANDA

Table 85
Performance Standards, Existing and Proposed, Land Development Division, Working Days

Activity	Initial Review	Suggested Initial Review	Update Review	Suggested Update Review, First Cycle	Second Cycle	Third Cycle
COMMERCIAL						
Concurrent/site plan	15	15	10	10	5	3
Concurrent/site plan, Smart Housing	5	5	2	2	1	0
SITE PLANS						
Small Project	9	10	5	3	3	1
Other Site Plans	20	15	10	10	5	3
SUBDIVISIONS						
Preliminary <60 acres	15	15	10	10	5	3
Preliminary >60 acres and <250 acres	20	15	10	10	5	3
Preliminary <250 acres	25	20	10	10	5	3
Vacation	15	10	10	5	3	1
All Others	20	15	10	10	5	3

Comment [AG70]: Why is Commercial Plan Review listed in this table?

28. ***Recommendation:*** **The performance measures for the Land Development Division should be changed as shown in Table __.**

Review Performance

<u>Actual Performance:</u> The Land Use Review Divisions review statistics for 2013-2014 are shown in Table __. This data was prepared by the Land Use Managing Engineer. Additional performance data is shown in Tables __, and __. The Amanda deadline is 21 days for first review and 14 days for subsequent reviews. The table documents that a high

Comment [AG71]: Redundant with information provided above.

percentage of the reviews are not meeting the deadlines. The deadline for Application Deadline is 28 days for first review and 14 days for subsequent reviews. Although these are better than the Amanda deadline percentages, Fire continues to be a major problem. Staff indicated that the Fire Dept. stated they are unable to meet review time frames because they are understaffed.

Comment [AG72]: This appears to be in conflict with the statement on page 24 that review times are being met.

Comment [AG73]: AMANDA

Table 89
Land Use Review Division 2013-2014 Review Statistics

Activity	Total Reviews	Comments At Amanda Deadline	Comments AT Application Deadline	2012 Number of Applications	2013 Number of Application	2014 Number of Applications	Average reviews Per Application 2013
Engineering Review (W/Q & drainage)	3,821	93.40%	98.80%				
Environmental Review	2,275	79.20%	98.90%				
Fire Review	645	12.90%	35.20%				
Land Use Review	11,917	80.10%	95.30%				
Site Plans	2,914	77.70%	93.90%	415	502	530	5.8
Subdivisions	1,286	64.50%	84.80%	267	315	367	4.1
Transportation Review	1,621	66.30%	92.80%				
Travis County	616	46.60%	70.10%				

Additional performance measures are shown in Table 88. There is some difference between the data in Table 89 and Table 88. However, they both show serious problems with timeline performance. Additionally, the use of average days is very misleading. At least the data should show the lowest and highest number. Another way to do it would be a table with categories like 25 days, 25 to 50, 50 to 100, etc.

Table 88
Development Process Performance, Land Use Review

Activity	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014*	2015
FTE's			66	62	62	65	67
# applications reviewed			2,667	2,615	2,928	3,562	3,260
# permits issues			1,894	3,382	3,319	3,575	3,841
% of on-time subdivision and site plan initial reviews			66%	47%	42%	39%	50%
Site Plan	21	18	22	28	29	27	
Subdivision	22	28	27	30	33	33	

Comment [AG74]: Table 89 comes before Table 88

Comment [MM[O75]: Do you not have the data to fill in table?

Comment [MM[O76]: We still are curious as to what the asterisk means? There is no reference. This same question is asked throughout the various chapters.

Comment [AG77]: Are these %, total numbers? Something else? It isn't clear from the Table

Activity	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014*	2015
Site Plan	81%	69%	65%	42%	42%	39%	
Subdivision	74%	58%	65%	59%	41%	39%	
Site Plan *	110	114	117	112	114	119	
Subdivisions*	127	163	124	102	108	110*2	
Combined Subdivision/Site Plan	206	196	186	188	209	210	
Site Plan*	53%	53%	54%	50%	49%	45%	
Subdivisions*	63%	50%	72%	65%	51%	57%	
Combined Subdivision/Site Plan	29%	29%	34%	32%	25%	23+%	

*These are times without Extensions. Times with Extensions are longer but the Extensions are requested by the applicant.

Comment [MM[O76]: We still are curious as to what the asterisk means? There is no reference. This same question is asked throughout the various chapters.

E. SITE PLANS AND SUBDIVISIONS

Overview

The Site Plan and Subdivision application processes vary depending on the type of application submitted and its location in the City.

Generally, applications may be reviewed and/or approved by one or more different entities, such as staff, the Board of Adjustment (BOA), the Planning Commission (PC), Zoning and Platting Commission ZAP), Environmental Board and the City Council (CC). In addition, grandfathering issues are decided by the 1704 team~~Committee~~ and projects within Historic Districts are considered by the Historic Landmark Commission (HLC) as well as other Commissions and Board.

Comment [AG78]: 245 not 1704

We believe this mix of review bodies and the number of groups larger than we see in many communities adds confusion to the process for customers as well as staff. The new City Council and CodeNEXT should address this issue.

Application and Submittal Processes

The following discussion summarizes the application and submittal processes for the Intake/ Notification, Site Plan Review, Special Review (City Arborist/Urban Forestry) and Subdivision Review functions and outlines our recommendations for improving the processes.

Administrative Approval Process for Site Plans/Subdivisions

As the Decision Authority table include later in this section indicates, Subdivision and Site Plan Review Staff has been delegated Administrative approval authority for certain types of Site Plans and Subdivision applications.

Comment [AG79]: included

The Administratively Approved Site Plan Flow Chart is very detailed and while an excellent tool for staff training, is not effective as a visual aid to help the users and general public understand the process.

29. ***Recommendation:*** **The Site Plan Review staff should update the Administratively Approved Site Plan Review flow chart to show only milestone steps.**

The approval process flow for Administrative Subdivision applications is shown under the "Subdivisions Process" heading below, as part of the overall Existing Commission Approved Subdivision Approval Process, Figure __.

Comment [ZS80]: May be out of place

Comment [AG81]: chart

Comment [MB82]: I did not have a separate admin flow chart – it is shown as part of the commission approved subdivision flow chart below.

30. ***Recommendation:*** **The Subdivision Review staff should create an updated Administratively Approved Subdivision Review flow chart that show milestone steps in the approval process and include it as a visual aid in application packets or development guides to help users better understand these processes.**

Checklists for Submittal

Staff reported and we observed that submittal checklists for "Commission approved Site Plan Review and Subdivision Review" applications are largely outdated and need to be updated. In the interim period, while the City transitions to electronic submittal, checklists should be paired down to the minimum required documents to facilitate review and action to further the City's green initiatives.

Comment [MB83]: Yes. Could be planning commission or zoning and platting commission – it depends on the geographic area.

Comment [ZS84]: is this the planning commission?

31. ***Recommendation:*** **The Site Plan Review and Subdivision Review staff should update submittal checklists for Commission approved applications to require the minimum number of documents necessary to facilitate review and action.**

Comment [AG85]: There are numerous recommendations throughout the report related to updating checklist, applications, flowcharts, etc. Is it possible to consolidate these into one recommendation that says essentially "staff should update the following materials ...."?

Completeness Check Review Process

Subdivision and Site Plan applications must undergo a Completeness Check Review process before they can be formally submitted for approval. The Completeness Review process is administered by Intake/Notification staff, however, according to staff, the Process has not been assigned to a particular manager within the Land Use Review Division to provide oversight. Staff indicates that the Process was intended to implement

SB 848, which defined application filing dates, deficiency notice/completeness checks, etc. for various types of applications, as well as ensure comprehensive applications are submitted for processing so that the review process is completed for efficiently.

The Completeness Process is not proactively monitored by an assigned Manager in order to identify, trouble-shoot and resolve issues, and there is little accountability for problems that arise, which was confirmed through the feedback that we received from both staff and focus groups. In our studies, we have found that government agencies often manage statutory completeness determinations through a combination of ways, such as: Using more highly skilled permit technicians to conduct intake activities, to provide for more in-depth quantitative screening and cursory plan review; the adoption of detailed submittal checklists that are used to help permit technicians determine if applications are complete; and the use of a development review committee/board to help determine completeness of a submittal (see our discussion under the "Zoning Case Management" section of this report concerning development review committees. However, we believe that the existing Completeness Check Review Process can work effectively as structured, with our recommendations, which are noted below.

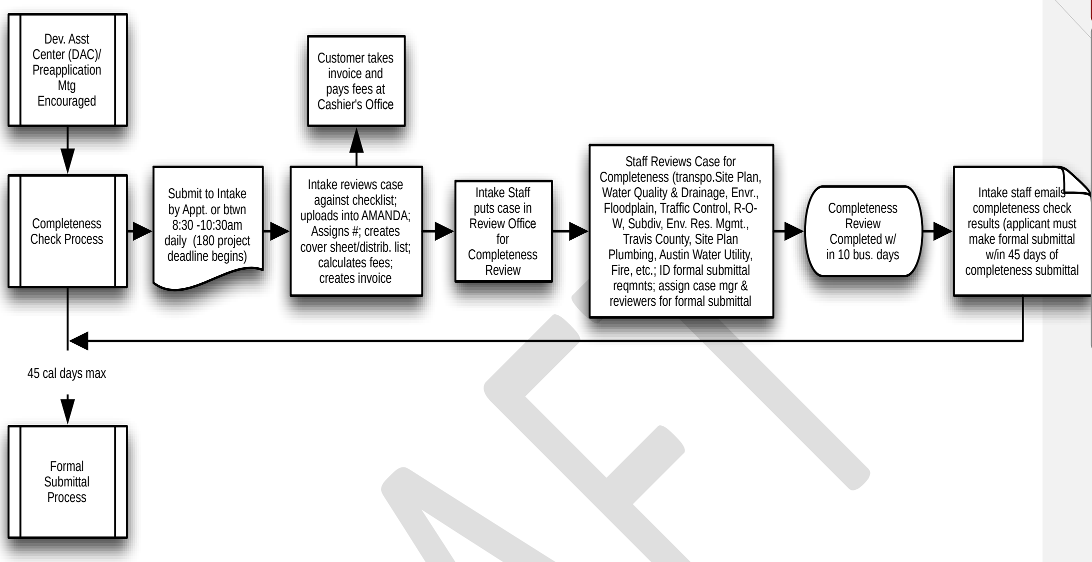
Comment [AG86]: Just say State legislation?

Comment [AG87]: typo

32. ***Recommendation:*** **The Managing Engineer should assign the Completeness Check Review process to the Intake/Notification function so that it is proactively managed, monitored and continuously improved.**

Figure __ shows the general flow and milestone steps of the existing Completeness Check Review Process. This process is detailed further within the context of the Administrative and Commission Site Plan Review processes and the Subdivision Review processes. It is summarized in the discussion that follows along with our recommendations for improvement.

Figure 174
Existing Completeness Check Review Process



Intake staff process Completeness Review applications in accordance with a Procedure Manual that has been adopted by the function, which is good. However, we reviewed the Manual and found that it does not provide step by step instructions for the Completeness Review intake process and serves as more of a reference guide, in that Customer Service Representatives (CSR) need to have an understanding of the process in order to use the Manual.

33. ***Recommendation:*** **The Procedure Manual for all submittal processes should be updated to provide CSR's with step-by-step instruction on submittal processes, to facilitate training and raise overall proficiency.**

Also see our recommendations under the "Training" heading of this section about providing Intake staff with additional training on the AMANDA system to ensure all Intake staff have the same level of expertise and understanding of workflow activities.

5. The applicant is encouraged to meet with the Development Assistance Center (DAC) prior to submitting a Completeness Check Review Application.
6. The Customer submits a Completeness Check Review application to Intake staff on the Fourth Floor, either without an appointment, between the hours of 8:30am-10:30am daily, or by appointment. A Customer Wait System (CWS) is utilized to

Comment [ZS88]: this seems crazy to me. I think completeness check should be completed in 5 days.

Comment [MB89]: I don't think this is a big deal in the scheme of things. Once week is not going to do much. Besides, I'm Not sure they could do it in 5 days until the updated AMANDA system is in place. They have heavy volumes, a difficult code and AMANDA configuration issues. Keep in mind also that this completeness review is a qualitative review that stands in place of a DRC completeness review that we often recommend. When we suggest a qualitative review through DRC, we often recommend that it occur within 1-2 weeks – which is the same time frame as this.

Comment [AG90]: What do the numbers 5 and 6 relate to?

Comment [ZS91]: I'll see what Brad says on this, but is DAC really where completeness check be accomplished?

Comment [MB92]: Could be logistical issue since they do not do intake. Also, how would it improve things? Reviewers would still have to do the reviews ?

place customers in a queue and notify Intake staff of waiting customers. Management staff indicates that wait times are monitored with 84% in 20 minutes or less with an average of 10 minutes, which is good.

See Recommendation _ that indicates wait times should be no more than 15 minutes.

7. The CWS is only configured to tell Intake staff the name of the customer waiting and does not provide details on the type of submittal. Staff indicated that submittal information would be helpful, but is not essential for Intake activities. Management staff indicates that they typically serve 10-15 walk in customers per day.

   Submittal requirements typically include paper copies of an Application, fee, Tax Forms, full size plans, plats, engineering reports and transportation reports, in accordance with published checklists that are available online.

   Currently, electronic submittal, payment and review is not available, however, the City is actively working toward electronic submittal, payment and review.

34. ***Recommendation:*** **The Completeness Check Review Process should be automated as soon as practicable through the AMANDA system to allow for electronic submittal, payment and electronic review.**

8. Intake staff review the submittal against a checklist to ensure that all required materials have been submitted. Incomplete applications may be accepted in the interest of customer service, however, processing is suspended until all materials are received, which requires Intake staff to track and manage incomplete submittals to ensure that required information is submitted and processing can continue. In addition, staff reported that Intake is charged with asking probing questions and conducting a cursory plan review to ensure that customers are accurately describing submittals and applying for appropriate approvals, however not all Intake staff perform this function, consistently, which has led to submittal/incomplete errors. Management staff indicated that they are actively working to resolve these issues through staff meetings, training and other means, which is good

   We reviewed various checklists and found that some were not up-to-date (e.g., required number of copies is excessive, instruction should be simplified).

35. ***Recommendation:*** **All Site Plan and Subdivision submittal checklists for Land Use Review applications should be reviewed to determine minimum submittal quantities and requirements and update accordingly so that they are an effective screening tool for Intake staff.**

Comment [AG93]: updated

Intake staff enters data into AMANDA and a case number is assigned through AMANDA. Review due dates are generated by AMANDA, but must be checked and manually corrected at times, due to configuration errors.

36. ***Recommendation:*** **The Managing Engineer should ensure that AMANDA is configured to calculate accurate review due dates.**

A completeness check coversheet and distribution list is generated by AMANDA and double checked by Intake staff to ensure accuracy. In addition, management staff also double checks the reviewer distribution list to ensure accuracy. Staff indicated that 3 systems (e.g., AMANDA, Intake staff and management staff) are needed to ensure that the appropriate staff are identified to complete reviews because the AMANDA system has configuration issues that, at times, has led staff to identify incorrect reviewers, which has delayed the process.

We discussed this issue with Intake staff and management staff and it is unclear whether errors in identifying the correct reviewers by application type is a training issue or an AMANDA configuration issue. The use of 3 systems to identify appropriate reviewers is inefficient and time-consuming and should be resolved as soon as possible.

37. ***Recommendation:*** **Determine whether the AMANDA system contains configuration errors that prevent accurate identification of reviewers in the Completeness Check Process or whether the issue stems from incomplete training and resolve the problem, accordingly.**

Intake staff calculate fees and a receipt is generated and given to the applicant who then takes the receipt to the cashier on the first floor for payment. Once payment is made, Cashier staff update AMANDA accordingly, and processing continues. Intake staff indicate that the AMANDA system is not properly configured to calculate fees accurately, in that it does not account for surcharge or discounts, thus fee calculation must be done manually in most instances, which is inefficient. We asked staff why payment is handled through a cashier on the first floor rather than through Intake staff and they indicated that it was set up as a measure to prevent theft and support sound accounting practice. Staff also noted that the City is working on creating an online fee payment system, which will improve fee payment efficiency overall.

Comment [ZS94]: couldn't they simply accept the payment here rather than going to the cashier?

38. ***Recommendation:*** **AMANDA should be configured to accurately calculate all application fees, including annual increases and surcharges and discounts. Online fee calculation and payment should be established as soon as practicable.**

3. Intake staff place all new Completeness Check Review applications in the designate Completeness Check Review office on the "new case table" for separate review by all disciplines that have been identified. Intake staff creates a new case report each day and place it in the Completeness Check Review office, so that function managers of each discipline can check the status of new cases and assign

Comment [AG95]: What does number 3 indicate?

reviewers to complete reviews. The assigned reviewers then become the review team for the project.

4. Staff reviewers consist of a completeness check team that includes reviewers from various PDRD disciplines, including: site plan, drainage, water quality, environmental, transportation, Environmental Resource Management (ERM), floodplain, right of way management, utility coordination, traffic control, and Austin Water Utility (AWU), Travis County, etc. The reviewers collaborate on the completeness review to determine whether the application is acceptable for a formal submittal. Other division and department reviewers can indicate at this time that they require distribution at formal submittal. Note in other parts of the report, we recommend that all reviews be handled with PDRD without any reviews needed by other departments.

   See recommendation about electronic review to streamline this process.

5. Completeness Check Review is completed within 10 business days/14 calendar days. Comments are placed in AMANDA, however customers cannot access AMANDA to determine whether a particular discipline has deemed their application complete.

39. ***Recommendation:*** **AMANDA should be configured so that customers can view the reviewer comments in the system and assess whether the application has been deemed complete by discipline.**

40. ***Recommendation*****: Completeness review should be completed within 5 business days.**

6. Intake staff notifies the customer by email whether their application is deemed complete on the last day of the review period. The email will note deficiencies, if any and outline formal submittal requirements and deadlines, fees, etc. Each Completeness Check application must be submitted and approved through the Completeness Check Process within 45 calendar days or the application will expire and a new Completeness Check Review fee assessed.

   Staff indicates that a separate email must be sent by Intake staff notifying customers about the status of their application because AMANDA is not configured to provide this notification.

41. ***Recommendation:*** **AMANDA should be configured to autofill and send a completeness determination template by email to customers that includes submittal requirements and deadlines.**

Comment [ZS96]: could this be done in 5 days?

Comment [MB97]: See previous comments

Decision Making Authority

Table __ below shows the Decision Making Authority for the Site Plan and Subdivision application processes in the Land Use Review Division.

Table _
Decision-Making Authority for Land Use Review Site Plan/Subdivision Planning Applications

Application Types	Staff	Director	1704 Committee	BOA	Environ. Board	Planning Commission/Zoning & Platting Commission[1]	City Council
Site Plans:							
Alternative Equivalent Compliance	D	N/A	N/A	D[2]	N/A	N/A	A
Boat Dock & Shoreline Modifications	D[2]	N/A	N/A	D[3]	D[4]	D[3]	A
Building, Parking, Clearing for Sites, Cut & Fill	D	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	N/A
CIP Street and Drainage	D	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	N/A
Conditional Use Permit	R	N/A	N/A		N/A	D	A
Consolidated	R/D[2]	N/A	N/A	D[3]	N/A	D/A	A
Fair Notice (1704/245 grandfathering)	R	D~~N/A~~	N/A~~D~~	N/A	N/A		N/A
Land Use Only	R	N/A	N/A	D[3]	N/A	D	A
Late Hours Permit	R	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	D	A
Off-site and Shared Parking	D	N/A	N/A	D[3]	N/A	A	N/A
Replacement Site Plan	D	N/A	N/A	D[3]	N/A	A	N/A
School Project	D	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	N/A
Site Plan Extension	D	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	N/A
Site Plan Revision	D	N/A	N/A	D[3]	N/A	A	N/A
Telecommunication Tower- Administrative	D[2]	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Telecommunication Tower-CUP	R	N/A	N/A		N/A	D	A
Withdraw and Resubmittal	R	D	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	N/A
Subdivisions:							
Amended Plat	R	D	N/A		N/A	A	N/A
Final Plat with Preliminary	R	D[2]	N/A		N/A	D[2]	A
Final Plat without a Preliminary-Previously Unplatted, Replat	R	D[2]	N/A		N/A	D[2]	A
Resubdivision	R	N/A	N/A		N/A	D	A
Managed Growth Agreement	R	R	N/A		N/A	N/A	D
Plat Vacation	R	D[2]	N/A		N/A	D[2]	A

Comment [AG98]: 245

Comment [AG99]: Should read as Land Use Commission

Comment [ZS100]: do you have the data to split this into 2 columns?

Comment [MB101]: No. But, I don't think it is necessary. The terms are interchangeable – the only difference is that the ZAP has purview over cases in certain areas.

Comment [MM[O102]: Noted corrections.

Comment [AG103]: Not accurate

Preliminary	R	N/A	N/A		N/A	D	N/A
Revised Preliminary	R	D	N/A		N/A	A	N/A
Withdraw and Resubmittal	R	D	`N/A		N/A	A	N/A

R = Review/Recommendation D=Decision A=Appeal N/A= Not Applicable B = Briefing only

[1] The City has two land use commissions: Planning Commission (PC) and Zoning and Platting Commission (ZAP). The ZAP has purview over cases in areas that do not have and adopted or ongoing neighborhood plan

[2] Approve in certain situations

[3] If variance needed, or compatibility encroachment issue

[4] If shoreline modification or heritage tree issues

As the above table shows, the Decision-Making Authority for the Site Plan and Subdivision Review functions allows more routine applications to be approved administratively by staff, which is a best practice. Best Practice Communities also typically set-up Administrative Approval processes to be submitted, paid for and approved electronically within a few days or right over-the-counter, which is a goal that the City is actively working towards.

Comment [AG104]: Note the purpose electronic plan review is not to allow approval within a few days or right over-the-counter. The purpose is to make it easier to submit plans, streamline the review process and reduce paper use among others.

The BOA hears site plan cases that involve certain types of variances and compatibility encroachment issues and the 1704 Team~~Committee~~ decides grandfathering issues.

The Land Use Commission (e.g., either the Planning Commission or Zoning Platting Commission) has decision-making authority on certain Site Plan and Subdivision Applications, as well as appeal authority on some types of applications. The City Council is the final decision-making body for Managed Growth Agreements, and the appeals body for only a few site plan and subdivision applications.

Given the case volumes and the complicated nature of the existing Land Development Code, the structure of the decision-making authority appears appropriate at this time, with the exception of shifting resubdivisions of 4 lots or less to staff-level approval (under certain conditions) as recommended in below.

Comment [ZS105]: will there be any value to merging the planning commission and the zoning and platting commission? or are the volumes too high?

Comment [MB106]: In the current planning write up I explain that the PC was split into the ZAP due to high case volumes. So, there would be No value in merging them

Delayed Reviews

Staff reported that city reviewers in other departments, outside of PDRD do not observe established review time frames, which are already lengthy, and are chronically late in completing reviews, which delays processing. In addition, County reviews are often not timely, despite Title 30 of the Land Development Code, which outlines review authority, rules and procedures for the City and County in ETJ areas and references the Agreement between the City and Travis County (e.g., Interlocal Agreement, April 2002) for Subdivision Platting in the ETJ area.

As recommended in other parts of this report, we recommend that other departments no longer be included in the review process.

Comment [AG107]: This should be rephrased to say that all reviews should be consolidated in PDR per other recommendations in the report. Comment from Greg Guernsey: May not be possible under Title 30/State law

See our recommendations under the "Performance Standards" heading regarding establishing standard and shortened review time frames for all City reviewers, and establishing an agreement with non-PDRD departments to adhere to review time frames.

PDRD Subdivision Review staff meet weekly with Travis County subdivision review staff in an effort to facilitate reviews and resolve issues, but County reviews are still delayed at times.

To help resolve this issue, staff suggested that the Agreement between the City and Travis County (e.g., Interlocal Agreement, April 2002) for Subdivision Platting/Title 30 be revised to delegate the County as the lead on additional types of projects within the ETJ area to the County. Staff believes that assigning broader approval authority to the County for subdivisions within the ETJ area would reduce City subdivision case volumes and shift review accountability to the County. The City would retain its review authority to ensure its interests are being met. However, since these areas will eventually become part of the City of Austin, we believe the focus for review should remain with the City.

The City should consider amending the Agreement/Title 30 to specify review performance standards for the County that are consistent with City review performance standards and that contain accountability provisions (e.g., if no response is received by the due date, the processing continues without County input).

42. ***Recommendation:*** **The City should consider amending the Agreement between the City and Travis County (e.g., Interlocal Agreement, April 2002) for Subdivision Platting/Title 30 to set specific performance standards.**

Development Review Committee (DRC)

Feedback from focus groups suggested a need for a formal Development Review Committee (DRC) to bring together reviewers from PDRD and other Deapartments to discuss and coordinate project reviews.

We investigated this issue and according to Staff, a type of DRC was in place a number of years ago, as part of the team review process (see "Current Planning" heading under "DRC" for discussion on team process), but was discontinued because it hindered processing for a number of reasons, including:

- Drainage and environmental issues would dominate the meetings and the remaining staff (e.g., 7-8 people) would be sitting in the meetings with little input, which was a waste of staff resources;
- Work volumes were too high and the meetings competed with other obligations;

Comment [AG108]: Many sections use the language of "staff suggested" "staff reported" etc. Is this typical language?

Comment [MB109]: Yes, but this is the county government and they can't be cut tout of the process as they have jurisdiction by interlocal agreement and city code. What the city could do is delegate more types of subdivision projects to them, so that they are responsible for processing timelines not the City.

Comment [ZS110]: what I think we should be doing is consolidating as much work as possible within PDRD as such I have trouble supporting this discussion particularly since these areas will likely become part of the city in the future. let's discuss.

Comment [ZS111]: Depending on our discussion, this recommendation will be deleted.

Comment [AG112]: Where is this? How does the reader find this?

- Staff turnover negatively impacted meetings, due to slow hiring practices and training learning curves (e.g., someone would leave and other staff would end up filling in for 6 months while the position was filled; it took months to train a new employee on complex codes);
- Project Manager issues; and
- Flextime and telecommuting (mandated) caused attendance issues.

Comment [AG113]: PDRD does not "mandate" flextime and telecommuting. We permit it under certain conditions. Is this referring to non-exempt employees who reach 40 hours due to night meetings etc. and have to leave before Friday at 5:00 pm since we cannot pay overtime?

Staff indicated that instead of using a formal DRC to help coordinate development review, staff provides the applicant with the option of meeting with all of the review staff or certain review staff, after the 1st cycle of review comments to discuss and resolve project issues. Staff indicated that these meetings are rarely requested by the applicant. In addition, if the project is substantial (i.e., complex issues, large or controversial), case managers will set up a staff meeting with the review team and the applicant to review the project as a group.

Staff's opinion is that the case volume in the Division is too great to establish a formal DRC that meets weekly, as they have so many other competing obligations and deadlines. They believe the current "informal" process of convening reviewers when needed to tackle review issues on the occasional complex project works effectively.

We are inclined to agree with staff's assessment, however only if the Case Managers are empowered by Management to act at "True" Case Managers/Project Managers, non-PDRD reviewers are no longer part of the process, review timeframes are shortened and monitored and a fee is established to help limit the number of review cycles, as we have recommended in this study.

Electronic Submittal, Review

Electronic submittal and review is not currently available for administrative or development review processes in the city. However, the City staff is actively working towards electronic submittal for all of its development application and permit processes, which is good. Because administratively approved processes are more straightforward, than discretionary processes, the City will likely implement these and other more routine processes first, where possible, which is good.

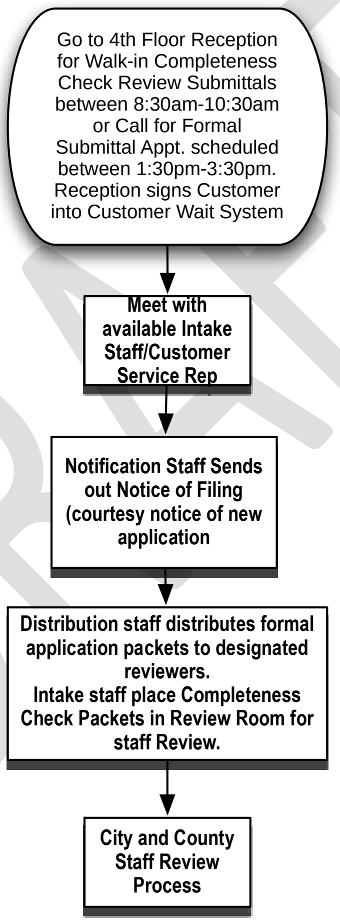
Checklists should be updated to include only the minimum required paper copies for submittal to reduce applicant costs, eliminate waste and further the City's green initiatives.

43. ***Recommendation:*** **The Site Plan and Subdivision Review staff should update administrative checklists to require only the minimum paper copies necessary for review and action to eliminate waste.**

Intake/Notification Process

A Customer/Administrative Service Supervisor manages the Intake and Notification functions, which also includes reception services for the Fourth Floor. Figure __ below summarizes the general flow of the Intake/notification function.

Figure __
Existing Intake and Notification Process Flow



Currently, 3 fulltime Customer Service Representatives (CSR's) handle the Intake process for various land use applications in the City, such as site plans, subdivision, zoning, tree permit and general permits, as well as short-term rentals, and other

Comment [MB114]: I put these heading in alphabetical order, rather than order of operation – which is why they seem out of place.

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Comment [ZS115]: This may be out of place

Comment [AG116]: At this point it feels like we have discussed the Intake/Notification process multiple times.

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Comment [ZS117]: where are these staff located?

miscellaneous permits. Two temporary CSR's manage activities associated with the "Google" project. Intake staff are located at the south end of the 4th Floor in cubicles that are accessible to the public through invitation.

The CSR's are responsible for managing intake for new submittals and re-submittals walk-in customers, as well as customer's with appointments. They also handle phone calls and coordinate with applicants/customers. Intake counter coverage is intended to be continuous with designated staff filling in during breaks, vacations and absences. However, at times, Intake staff has not been available to complete intake tasks.

Management staff indicated that the occasional lack of coverage could be the result of inappropriate staffing levels in this function.

See our discussion and recommendation under the "staffing" heading of this section concerning staffing levels.

Staff indicates that they have not been cross-trained adequately in order to provide back-up support across the Intake/Notification function.

See our discussion and recommendation under the "training" heading of this section concerning cross-training Intake and Notification staff to provide back up, raise overall understanding and competency and add job interest.

Our interviews revealed that there have been long-standing human resource issues in the Intake function, which has hindered teamwork and training and staff turnover..

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Also see our recommendations under the "Training" heading of this section concerning additional training on AMANDA; the "Meetings" heading concerning establishing training time during staff meetings; and the "Procedures Manual" heading about updating the Manual.

We also received feedback that the Intake function has experienced quality control issues and that additional quality control measures should be instituted to reduce errors and hold staff accountable. We discussed this issue with management staff and found that management staff is actively performing quality control checks at various stages of the Intake process to improve work quality and reduce errors, which is good. In addition, the resolution of AMANDA configuration issues, completion of staff training and teamwork initiatives and active management of the process will also help to improve the quality of completeness check reviews.

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Intake staff (i.e., Customer Service Representatives) handles walk in customer Completeness Check submittals and re-submittals on a first-come, first serve basis. Submittals made by appointment are scheduled during afternoon hours and assigned to one of the three available Intake staff in advance of the submittal. Currently, each Intake staff is scheduled for 2 formal submittals each afternoon, allowing the function to accommodate 6 formal submittals per day. Each formal submittal takes about 45 minutes to process and involves screen checking the application, data entry into AMANDA, fee calculation, case number assignment, reviewing distribution assignment, generating of reviewer distribution memos, creation of comment pages in AMANDA and numerous manual cross checks to ensure data entry is correct. The applicant sits with Intake staff, during the Intake process. In addition, Intake staff forward submittal packets to Notification staff to provide notice and distribution.

Comment [MB118]: It is long. As I noted, configuration errors, cross checks, etc., extend the submittal process. They need to get all configuration errors fixed and get staff more training.

Comment [ZS119]: this seems long to me. is the applicant waiting while this process is completed? if so, the applicant should be sitting with the staff while they perform these functions.

Management staff indicated that formal submittal appointments are currently backlogged by almost one week. Training/cross-training and the resolution of configuration errors will likely increase efficiency, which can help to eliminate backlogs. However, given customer concerns for timelines, there should be no backlog to this function. We also recommend under the "staffing heading" that management complete a staffing analysis to determine staffing needs based on labor data.

44. ***Recommendation*: Add temporary or contract staff to remove the backlog for the intake function.**

The Notification function consists of one Senior Administrative Assistant and 3 Administrative Assistants. Notification staff are generally responsible for sending out early notices to property owners, renters, neighborhood and environmental groups, creating notification maps, residential design project notices, scheduling Commission and Board of Adjustment meetings through AMANDA, providing public notice and creating property posting signs. All new site plans and subdivisions applications, including administrative cases, receive this early notice.

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Comment [AG120]: Intake staff do not schedule cases for Commission or BOA

Assigned Notification staff are also responsible for distributing paper copies of submittal and re-submittal packets/plans to various reviewers within PDRD as well reviewers within other City Departments and affected Counties.

Early notice (e.g., notice of new application) for new cases is sent for every new preliminary plat subdivision, and almost all new site plans, except for Site Plan revisions to previously approved site plans and small site plans. Notices are mailed to the applicant, real property owners, renters and registered environmental or neighborhood organizations within 500' of the subject property (1000' for big box applications), within 14 calendar days of the submittal. Staff indicated that notice is typically provided within a few days of the receipt of a new application. The notice describes the application, identifies the applicant and the entity approving the application, states the earliest date action on the application can occur, describes the procedures for registering as an interested party, outlines appeal processes (if any) and the staff managing the application. The parties that

Comment [AG121]: Redundant with highlighted text above.

Comment [ZS122]: seems to me that this should only be a few days

Comment [MB123]: Remember they have lots of volume. Notice goes out ASAP, but code gives them up to 14 days. I clarified above.

receive early notice then have 14 days to respond to the notice to register as interested parties. Given citizen interest in the process early notice should be given as soon as possible.

45. ***Recommendation:*** **Early notice should be provided within 3 days of application receipt.**

In addition, Notification staff are responsible for handling notices for hearings, once they are scheduled, which may include mailing, publishing and posting the property.

In addition to Intake/Notification staff, the function also consists of one Administrative Assistant that serves as a receptionist for the Fourth Floor reception office. This function also had a Planner II position that assisted with reception and other administrative duties in the function, but was recently transferred to the Special Review/City Arborist function.

Multiple Review Cycles
We received focus group feedback, which was confirmed by staff, as well as through the data we received, that multiple review cycles are common with administrative review processes, as well as discretionary review processed. Site Plan Review staff indicated that 2-3 reviews are typically required for Administrative Site Plans and Subdivisions. For projects subject to the City's early notice requirements, the First Cycle Review time frames are generally 28 calendar days, which includes 21 calendar days for staff to complete comments), plus 7 calendar days for the case manager to create the master comment letter/report). Subsequent Cycle reviews are generally 21 calendar days, which includes 14 calendar days for staff to complete their review comments, plus 7 days for the case manager to create the master comment letter/report).

This review time scheme is based on the City's early notice code, which requires the city to provide an early notice to interested parties within 14-day days of submittal and allows interested parties a 14-day response time (e.g., 14+14 =28).

However, there are exceptions. For example, final plats do not receive early notice, but are subject to the same review timeframes. In addition, Off-street Parking Site Plans do receive early notice, but have a 21-calendar day review time frame.

In addition, Small site plan projects (as defined by code) and Site Plan Revisions to previously approved site plans and Site Plan Small Project do not receive early notice and have slightly shorter review timeframes (e.g., 14 calendar days for revisions and 9 calendar days for small projects).

Numerous staff are often involved in the review process, some of which are in different departments, which can further lengthen already lengthy review cycles. For example, it was reported that Fire Department reviews often surpass the 28-day time frame, which delays processing.

Comment [ZS124]: I'm not certain what administrative review means but I assume they are fairly simple. If so, 21 days is too long.

Comment [MB125]: You established the performance data, so I left as you noted. We can try to shorten it to 14 days, but it is a bigger issue. It is generally, based on their early notice code requirement (with a few exceptions) . In addition, Administrative site plans are not routine and involve complex analysis, legal issues, agreements, etc. See my comments that explain where the city came up with the review time frames as well as the paragraph in the next section below. I have asked staff to give me a breakdown of review time frames for site plan and subdiv cases by type, so that your chart is more accurate. I will send once I receive.

Comment [MM[O126]: This happens only if there is an associated variance, otherwise there is no notice.

Although various Site Plans are approved administratively, they are often involve complex issues (e.g., legal issues, zoning issues, agreements, etc.). which takes more review time (see additional discussion below) and process.

We have recommended shortened review timeframes for subsequent review cycles (***See our recommendations under the "Performance Standards" heading for shortening review time frames)***, which should help to streamline and shorten overall all approval times. We have also recommended changes for the "Completeness Review Check Process," which should help to improve the quality of submittals and may help to streamline Completeness processing.

In addition, we have recommended that reviews for administrative and discretionary applications be totally handled within PDRD without need for review by external departments. Finally, we have recommended that the City establish a fee for the 3rd and subsequent reviews to help limit the number of review cycles.

However, County reviewers for areas within Watershed areas and other areas where the City acts as the lead on processing are not bound by City review standards and may continue to slow the review processing. Subdivision staff indicate that they meet weekly with County reviewers to discuss projects and resolve issues to help eliminate County review delays, which is good.

Also discussion under the "Delayed Reviews" heading in the "Process Issues" section below for an recommendations to address County reviews.

Processing Timelines/Time Extensions
Feedback from focus groups and staff interviews indicated that administrative approval timeframes for both Site Plan Review and Subdivision Review generally take too long.

Site Plan Review Staff indicated that it takes between 2-5 months to obtain approval on an Administrative Site Plan, depending on the application type. Subdivision Review Staff indicated that it takes at least 3 months to obtain administrative subdivision approval.

Comment [ZS127]: maybe I need to understand what administrative site plan is, but this sounds outrageous to me.

Feedback from Focus groups indicated that these processing timeframes are excessive for administrative approvals. We investigated this issue and found that many types of site plans that are administratively approved are not as routine as those typically found in other cities. For example, it is not uncommon for Site Plan Reviewers to have to work on very complex legal issues, such as right-of-way vacations, parkland exchange, etc, within the context of a site plan. In addition, some administrative site plans are subject to an overview by certain boards, even though the board does not have approval authority. Moreover, due to the complex code, administrative site plans are often located within multiple overlay zones, that have intricate code requirements and are reviewed by numerous other city departments and agencies. Finally, applicant turn-around times are often lengthy and time extensions are commonplace, both of which extend processing.

Site Plans and Subdivisions must be approved within 180 calendar days per the City's Land Development Code (measured from Completeness Check submittal to approval). Per State Law, Plats are to be acted upon within 30 days after the date the plat is filed and a plat is considered approved unless it is disapproved within that period. A plat is considered approved by the governing body unless it is disapproved within that period.

Comment [AG128]: These applications can be extended by 180 days. This is covered on page 44 but it should be discussed here rather than later in the report.

Subdivision Review Staff indicated that they can't meet the Plat action timeframes established by State law and as a result, plats are placed on the Commission consent agenda for statutory disapproval immediately upon formal submittal (e.g., following completeness review), which prevents plats from automatically being approved due to inaction and allows staff to continue to process subdivision applications. We feel that this is an indictment of the system, partially caused by numerous code and policy issues that are intended to provide lots of neighborhood input and allow 1 year for processing.

Comment [ZS129]: I understand why they do this but this is an indictment of the entire process. what should we do?

Comment [MB130]: We can't fix this because it is the result of numerous code and policy issues that are intended to provide lots of neighborhood input and allow 1 year for processing.

Generally, Staff believes that they are unable to meet subdivision statutory action timeframes because of a combination of factors, including:

- Lengthy review time frames;
- Multiple review cycles;
- Heavy case volumes and uneven caseloads;
- Lengthy applicant turn-around times;
- Incomplete plans;
- Lack of good first reviews;
- An overly complex Land Development Code, that is continually amended;
- City policies that generally require all issues to be resolved prior to project approval instead of allowing project approval subject to conditions that resolve outstanding issues;
- Postponements and appeals by interested parties; and
- Time extensions.

We have recommended that the City revisit its policies relating to postponements with the goal of eliminating this code provisions as a tool to stall action on a development proposal.

Staff indicated that time extensions to extend the 180 calendar day review timeframe for site plans and subdivisions are commonplace, especially for discretionary project

Comment [ZS131]: does this apply to both site plans and subdivision?

approvals. The Land Development Code provides for one administrative time extension of 180 days. Subsequent time extensions are done by discretionary approval. Administrative time extensions are routinely approved. However, according to staff, these decisions can be appealed by interested parties, which prolongs processing. Because there is little grounds to dispute a requested time extension, the appeal process essentially serves to slow the process down. Focus group and staff interviewees suggested that the Code be amended to provide for a 1-year time extension or eliminate the appeal provisions since the appeal is being used to obstruct the process and there are no substantive grounds to justify disapproval of a time extension. We believe that Time Extension provisions are a useful tool to allow staff and decision-makers and should be preserved. However, the City should either eliminate or establish more narrow criteria for invoking Appeals for Time Extensions.

46. ***Recommendation:*** **The Land Development Code should be amended to either eliminate or establish more narrow criteria for invoking Appeals for time extensions to curtail its use as a tool to hinder application processing.**

Project Manager/Case Manager System

We received feedback that Site Plan Review Case Managers do not act as "true" project managers. Staff said that they act as the lead on assigned Site Plan Review cases, but have not been given full authority and/or are not recognized by other development-related functions as "true Project Managers." We discuss this issue in greater detail under the "Current Planning" section of this report, where we also recommend that Zoning Case Managers be given authority as "true Project Managers."

Subdivision Review Case Managers feel that are sufficiently empowered and indicate that they manage cases as project managers for projects within the City's control (e.g., some projects are managed by the County, per Title 30/Interlocal Agreement), in that they act as the lead to drive review time frames and challenge inappropriate conditions, etc.

Comment [ZS132]: seems like we need to clarify this. they say they are and you say they're not. so we need to be specific about what they need to do.

Comment [MB133]: I say that site plan review managers are not empowered, but subdivision review planners are empowered.

47. ***Recommendation:*** **The Site Plan staff should be empowered to act as "true Project Managers," on assigned Site Plan Review cases to drive development review and processing.**

We consider this to be a key recommendation, particularly as other departments will no longer be involved in the process. It may be appropriate to review the qualifications for Case Managers.

48. ***Recommendation:*** **Review the qualifications for site plan case managers.**

Also see our recommendations under the "Performance Standards" heading about establishing performance standards for up to three review cycles and tracking and monitoring standards to ensure they are met 90% of the time.

Staff Reports

Staff reports for both the Site Plan Review and Subdivision Review functions are prepared using a template to facilitate report writing, which is good. Subdivision Review staff indicated that the believed staff report templates (e.g., Subdivision Review Sheet) could be further streamlined through a table and checklist format, especially since there is minimal discretionary oversight with subdivision applications. We reviewed several recent Subdivision Review Sheets and found them to be fairly concise, however they could be further streamlined through a checklist format as suggested.

We also reviewed several Site Plan Review staff reports (e.g., Site Plan Review Sheet) and found the reports to be sufficiently comprehensive. However, these reports could also be further streamlined through the use of tables and checklists.

49. ***Recommendation:*** **The Site Plan and Subdivision Review staff should consider streamlining staff reports (e.g., Review Sheets) through the tables and checklists. Staff should develop and discuss new report formats with relevant commissions prior to utilization.**

Streamlining

The Administrative approval processes for both the Site Plan Review and Subdivision functions have been fairly streamlined. Site Plan Review staff indicated that most types of the site plan applications can be approved administratively by staff, rather than the Commission or Council, which is good. However, that does not mean they are approved immediately, as many types of administratively approved site plans are very complex, as noted above. Site Plan applications are generally discretionary when proposal involves a use, variance, development in a Hill Country Roadway Corridor and other specific criteria established by the Land Development Code (Land Development Code §25.5.142).

However, Subdivision Review Staff indicated that there is an opportunity to amend the Land Development Code to allow re-subdivision cases that are 4 lots or less that meet certain criteria (e.g., no variances, abuts right-of-way, etc.), to be approved administratively, rather than through a discretionary process. Staff believes administrative approval for this type of re-subdivision is not only allowed, but intended by state law.

50. ***Recommendation:*** **The Land Development Code should be amended to allow re-subdivision cases that are 4 lots or less that do not have variances, and meet certain criteria to be approved administratively by Subdivision Review Staff.**

In addition, Subdivision Review staff indicated that certain Final Plats (e.g., without a Preliminary Plat, etc.) are approved by the Land Use Commission as a result of a state law interpretation made by the Legal Department. However, other Texas communities allow Final Plats to be approved by staff, since there is no discretion involved in the approval. We have worked in several other Texas communities and found that Final Plats are approved administratively in other Texas jurisdictions.

51. ***Recommendation:*** **The City should amend the Land Development Code to allow certain Final Plats (e.g. final plats without preliminary plats, etc.), to be approved administratively by Subdivision Review staff.**

G. SITE PLANS

Overview

Site Plans may be required to determine whether a proposed development complies with the Land Development Code, or the community standards established for Austin as reflected in Austin ordinances. A site plan is a drawing that depicts the intensity, density, height and setbacks of a proposed project to the site itself, along with drainage, landscaping, sidewalk and other site construction issues. The Site Plan process is shown in Figure 84. The case types for Site Plan are:

1. Consolidated "C"
~~1.~~2. Non-Consolidated
~~2.~~3. Late Hours Permit
4. Commission Approved Site Plan
   Conditional Use Permit
   ~~3.~~ Hill Country Roadway
~~4.~~5. Building, Parking, Clearing for Sites, Cut & Fill "D"
~~5.~~6. Site Plan Revision
~~6.~~7. Site Plan Extension
~~7. School Project~~
8. Utility Line
9. Managed Growth Agreement
10. Boat Dock & Shoreline Modifications

Comment [ZS134]: educate me on this. my impression is that code uses land use commission but then may refer to either the planning commission or the platting and zoning commission. should we be more specific here?

Comment [MB135]: The Commission or Land Use Commission is one in the same. Either term refers to the Planning Commission or the ZAP. The real point is that some plats are required to go to the land use commission (could be ZAP, could be PC) instead of being approved by staff.

Comment [ZS136]: what do you mean by "certain" final plats?

Formatted: (none)

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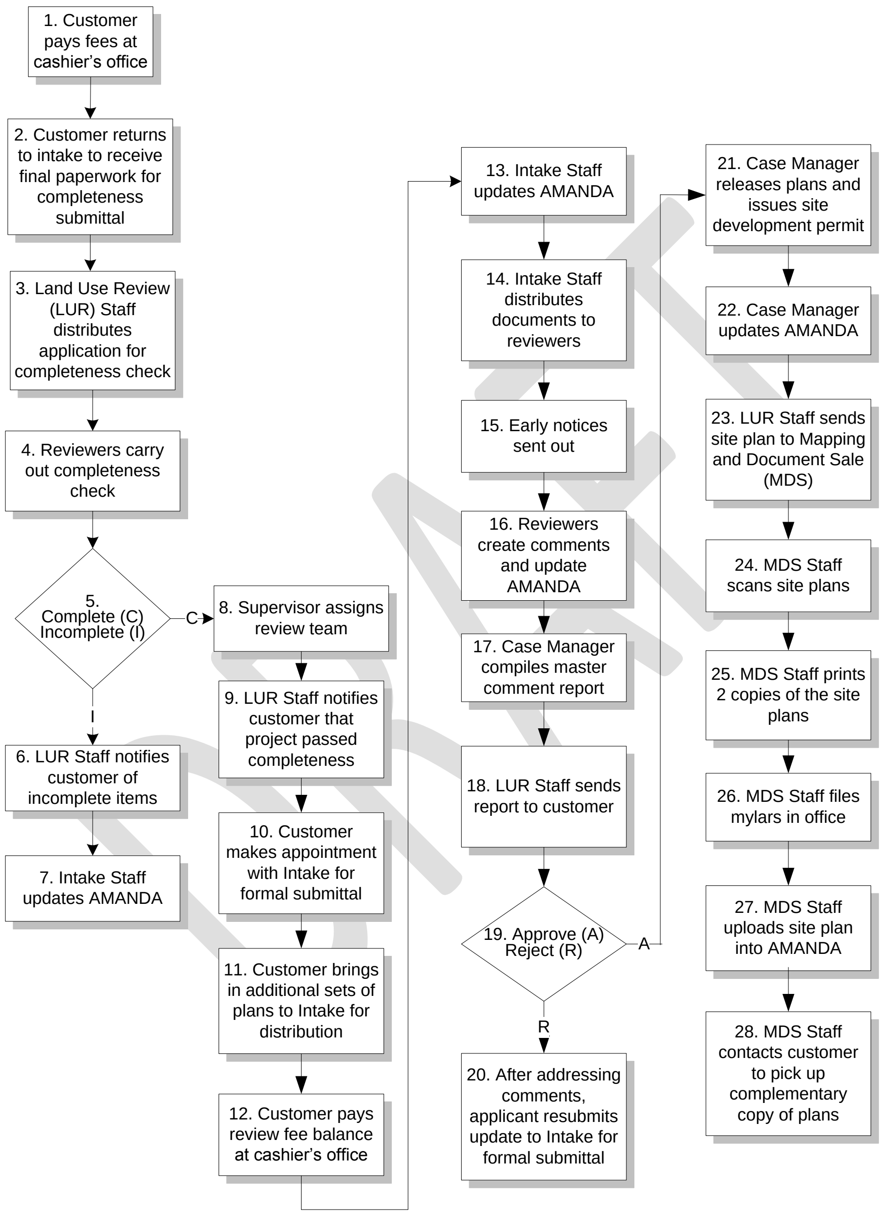
Formatted: English (U.S.)

Comment [MM[O137]: There isn't a separate site plan application for school projects

11. Telecommunication Tower
12. Replacement Site Plan
13. Fair Notice
14. ~~Withdraw and Resubmittal~~
~~15.~~14. Land Use Only "A"
~~16.~~15. Off-site and Shared Parking
~~17.~~16. CIP Street and Drainage
~~18.~~17. Open Channel Drainage Detention

Comment [MM[O138]: Not a formal application

Figure 84
Administrative Site Plan Review



Note That:

- The applicant submits a site plan for administrative review if it does not require land use commission approval based upon criteria in the code. For example, a site plan proposing a conditional use would have to go to a land use commission for approval. If the project requires commission approval, see Commission Approved Site Plan Review Flow Chart.
- From the time of completeness submittal to the time of approval there is a code mandated 180 day update deadline. An applicant can request an extension of the update deadline, which may be granted for good cause at the director's discretion. In general, the process takes two to five months.
- A site plan application can be submitted concurrently with a commercial building review application.
- After the permit is issued, the customer has three years to complete the project. A one year extension can be granted administratively, otherwise the extension request must be approved by a land use commission.
- Site plan corrections (minor changes to the approved site plan) may be submitted and approved through the Development Assistance Center (DAC). Site plan revisions (major changes to the approved site plan) must be approved through the process in this flow chart. For the distinction between "major" and "minor" corrections, see Land Development Code.

1. Intake Staff determines the type of site plan at this time. The customer must submit an HB 1704/Chapter 245 Determination Form at this time.

2. The Chapter 245 Completeness Check Team reviews all submittals requesting a determination from the Team. The Team meets two times each week. After the Team makes a determination, Intake Staff distributes the application for completeness check.

3. A $200 fee is due for the completeness check.

4. The completeness check team consists of reviewers from various disciplines, including: site plan, drainage, water quality, environmental, transportation, environmental resource management (ERM), floodplain, right of way management, utility coordination, traffic control, and Austin Water Utility (AWU). The reviewers collaborate on the completeness review to determine whether the application is acceptable for a formal submittal. Other division and department reviewers can indicate at this time that they require distribution at formal submittal. The completeness check team must respond regarding the project within 10 days or else the project is automatically accepted and any errors or omissions are handled during the review period.

5. Completeness is determined by the comments of the reviewers.

6. The applicant can submit any incomplete items to intake. The process continues from completeness submittal. The applicant has 45 days to complete the application for formal submittal. If the 45 days expires, the applicant must pay an additional $200 which will not be removed from the fee balance.

Comment [AG139]: Are these notes essential information for the reader? They are repeated for several application types and add numerous pages to the report. Could they just be handled through a brief note with direction that certain conditions apply?

8. Each team consists of a case manager and site plan, drainage, water quality, environmental, transportation, and mapping reviewers. The review team may also include reviewers from other divisions or departments. The teams are assigned based upon current workload and case background.

9. Passed completeness form is sent to customer and includes total fees required at formal submittal.

10. Updates are submitted at this step. They do not require a second completeness check.

12. The review fees are determined by a fee schedule based on acreage and location. The $200 completeness check fee is deducted from total fees due.

15. Notifications Staff uses monthly-updated Travis County Appraisal District GIS data to generate a list of property owners to receive early notices. The Land Development Code (LDC) codifies who receives notices, including: property owners within a specified distance from the site plan property; the respective neighborhood group; and for some site plans, utility service addresses (typically a lessee).

16. Reviewers complete a detailed review of the site plan for items within their discipline. Collaboration occurs between reviewers. At this time, reviewers calculate construction inspection fees (paid to PW) and fiscal. The reviewers give Fiscal Surety staff cost estimates. See Fiscal Surety: Site Plans flow chart. The customer is notified of the fees and fiscal. All fees and fiscal must be paid prior to the approval of the site plan. Also at this time, the mapping reviewer populates their database to say that a site plan application is processed and does the addressing for the site.

17. The master comment report is due 28 days after the initial format submittal. Subsequent update reports are due 14 days after the formal submittal step.

18. LUR Staff sends master comment report to the applicant and interested parties who have registered with the case manager.

20. Usually the process requires 1-3 updates. The applicant returns to the formal submittal step each time a formal update is required. Updates are only distributed to reviewers that have not approved the project. The applicant submits informal updates directly to the case manager who distributes the update to the required reviewers.

21. For site plans in the city limits, the case manager signs the site plan cover sheet and the site plan release block on all other sheets. For site plans in the City's ETJ, the case manager signs the cover sheet and stamps/initials all other sheets. It is the responsibility of the customer to apply for a building permit with the Commercial Building Review Division, if necessary. The customer must submit a copy of the site development permit and the approved plans when applying for the building permit.

22. The AMANDA site plan folder will indicate that the application is approved and released. An environmental inspection folder is created by AMANDA. The signed site development permit is scanned and attached in AMANDA.

24. MDS~~MIDS~~ Staff ensures that the set of mylars is ready for scanning and that the pages are in the correct order. All site plans are scanned, including those in the ETJ.

Comment [MM[O140]: Do you mean MDS

26. The mylars are only filed in the office for site plans within the city limits.

28. Second copy is for Environmental Inspection. See Environmental Inspections flow chart and/or Site Subdivision intake flow chart for continuation of this process.

Applications, Checklists, Flowcharts

Staff reported and we confirmed that various applications, checklists and flow charts for the function are outdated. For example, checklists have not been paired down to include only what is necessary for processing. As such, customers are submitting excess copies, which adds costs for applicants and results in extra handling by Intake and Distribution staff and recycling of extra copies. Flow charts have been prepared for internal use, but have not been updated in several years and they are too complex for public use (see the "Process Issues" section to view flowcharts). We have recommended that they be updated and simplified under the "Process Issues" heading of this section.

In addition, multiple applications are utilized in an effort to help sort and simplify the Site Plan Review process for users and staff. The applications attempt to explain and clarify development review procedures, but fall short and the result is a lengthened application form that provides incomplete information to users. Best practice communities are trending toward the use of a single master application that is supplemented by detailed checklists to guide the submittal process. In addition, best practice communities with complex development codes, such as Austin's, often prepare development guides to provide more comprehensive information and instruction on application processes.

52. ***Recommendation:*** **Site Plan applications should be consolidated into a single Master Application that is supplemented by detailed, up-to-date checklists for each application type.**

53. ***Recommendation:*** **The Managing Engineer should consider publishing a Development Guide or Handbook that provides detailed explanations of the Site Plan, Subdivision Review and other processes, along with flow charts to help clarify processes for users. The Guide should be available online and provide links to referenced code sections, where possible.**

Data Collection/Reporting

Activity reports were not readily available through AMANDA or other reporting methods to provide data on current caseloads by function or by individual reviewer to help management staff gauge staffing resources. In addition, applicant turn-around/revision time data should also be collected so that management has a more accurate picture of processing times, exclusive of application revision timeframes.

54. ***Recommendation:*** **The Coordinator should work with CMT to configure AMANDA to collect and report on case load data by reviewer and the function as a**

Comment [MB141]: Clarified point

Comment [AG142]: Is this referring to the Site Plan Section Manager is a Development Services Process Coordinator? If so I think it would be clearer to say Site Plan Section Manager.

Comment [AG143]: CTM

whole on monthly and annual intervals, as well as Performance Standard data recommended by this Study.

Filing System

Staff reported that paper files are misplaced regularly and that an out card system should be re-established so that files can be tracked and managed better.

55. ***Recommendation:*** **This function should re-institute an out card system for paper files.**

Meetings

A weekly meeting is held between the Coordinator and Site Plan Review staff to discuss important case issues and trends, resolve case-related problems, team-build, train, and relay information of Division and Department-wide importance, which is excellent. An agenda is prepared for meetings to facilitate and focus discussions.

Comment [AG144]: See comment AG 131

Planner Of The Day (POD)

We received feedback that a POD is needed for the Division when technical Site Plan Review questions arise. In addition, some staff reported that they are frequently interrupted for assistance.

However, in investigating this issue, we found that this function rarely experiences walk-in customers, since walk-in customers are routed to the Development Assistance Center (DAC) for service. As such, walk-in traffic is uncommon and when it occurs, staff will provide assistance, as needed. Applicants are instructed early on that the Division's policy is to require appointments to discuss application-related issues, so that staff can manage their time more effective to facilitate processing. Calls received by individual case managers are typically application-specific. Other general calls are routed to the DAC for assistance.

Policies/Procedures

Staff has drafted fairly comprehensive procedures to explain the Site Planning process, which is used for training and educational purposes. In addition, some of this information was included in application forms, as noted above. However, some components need to be updated to reflect code and operational changes.

56. ***Recommendation:*** **Training policies and procedures should be updated to reflect code and operational changes.**

57. ***Recommendation:*** **Alternative Equivalent Compliance/DAC data and case history layers in GIS should be integrated into the AMANDA system.**

Comment [AG145]: This seems out of place.

Processes

The processes established for Commission approved Site Plan Review and Subdivision Review Processes varies somewhat depending on the type of application (e.g., whether the application includes variances, etc.).

Site Plans Reviews required to determine whether a proposed development complies with the Land Development Code, or the community standards established for Austin as reflected in Austin ordinances. A site plan is a drawing that depicts the intensity, density, height and setbacks of a proposed project to the site itself, along with drainage, landscaping, sidewalk and other site construction issues. Site Plans have been categorized into in order to help simplify the application process.

Comment [AG146]: Redundant, see page 46.

In addition, staff uses a prefix system to help ensure site plans are processed using the correct procedure. "A" Site Plans are generally those applications that deal with uses or zoning only. "B" Site Plans are those involving "vertical" construction. "C" Site Plans are applications that involve both use/zoning and "vertical" construction. "D" Site Plans are infrastructure-related Site Plans and "T" Site Plans are those that deal with transportation, such as off-site parking.

Below is a list of various categories of Site Plans. In some instances we have shown their associated Prefix.

Comment [ZS147]: should there be separate standards for each one of these?

Comment [MB148]: Yes, there are separate submittal requirements for each type.

1. Boat Dock & Shoreline Modifications ("D" Site Plan)
2. Building, Parking, Clearing for Sites, Cut & Fill ("D" Site Plan)
3. CIP Street Drainage ("D" Site Plan)
4. Conditional Use Permit ("C" or "A" Site Plan)
5. Consolidated ("C" Site Plan)
6. Fair Notice/1704 Determination
7. Land Use Only "A" Site Plan
8. Late Hours Permit
9. Managed Growth Agreement
10. Off-site and Shared Parking ("T" Site Plan)
11. Open Channel Drainage Detention ("D" Site Plan)
12. Replacement Site Plan ("C" Site Plan)
13. School Project
14. Site Plan Extension

15. Site Plan Revision
16. Telecommunication Tower (“C” Site Plan)
17. Utility Line (“D” Site Plan)
18. ~~Withdraw and Resubmittal~~

Comment [MM[O149]: Not a formal application

The City’s site planning process is fairly intricate as a result of the complex Land Development Code. Figure __ below is a flow chart, prepared by staff that summarizes the Intake and Completeness Check Review Process required for a “Consolidated Site Plan.” As the flow chart shows there are various components that determine the appropriate fees, timelines and review staff.

Figure __
Existing Intake & Completeness Check Review Process
For Consolidated Site Plan Process

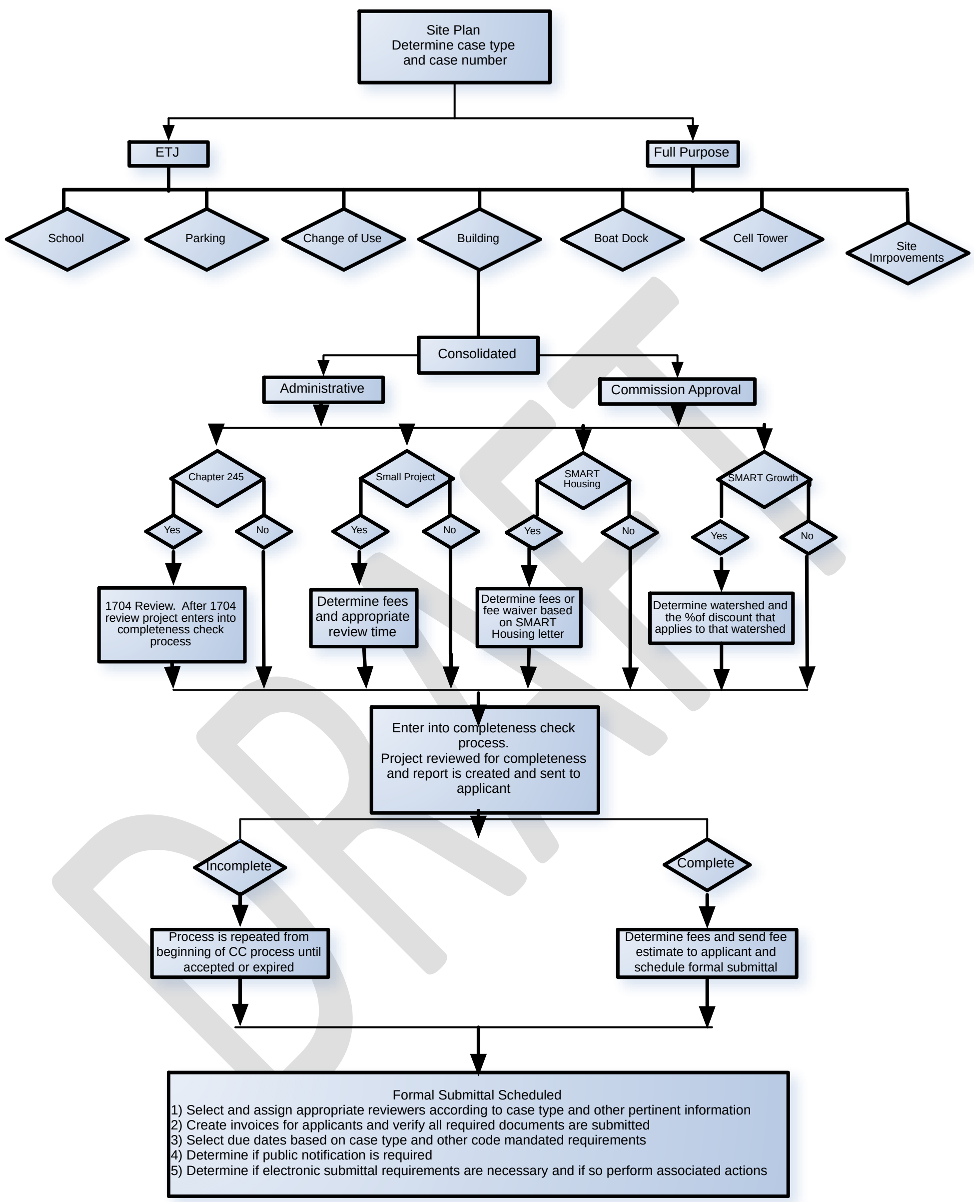

Site Plan
Determine case type
and case number
ETJ
Full Purpose
School
Parking
Change of Use
Building
Boat Dock
Cell Tower
Site
Imrpovements
Consolidated
Administrative
Commission Approval
Chapter 245
Small Project
SMART
Housing
SMART Growth
Yes
No
Yes
No
Yes
No
Yes
No
1704 Review. After 1704 review project enters into completeness check process
Determine fees and appropriate review time
Determine fees or fee waiver based on SMART Housing letter
Determine watershed and the %of discount that applies to that watershed
Enter into completeness check process.
Project reviewed for completeness and report is created and sent to applicant
Incomplete
Complete
Process is repeated from beginning of CC process until accepted or expired
Determine fees and send fee estimate to applicant and schedule formal submittal
Formal Submittal Scheduled
1) Select and assign appropriate reviewers according to case type and other pertinent information
2) Create invoices for applicants and verify all required documents are submitted
3) Select due dates based on case type and other code mandated requirements
4) Determine if public notification is required
5) Determine if electronic submittal requirements are necessary and if so perform associated actions
DRAFT

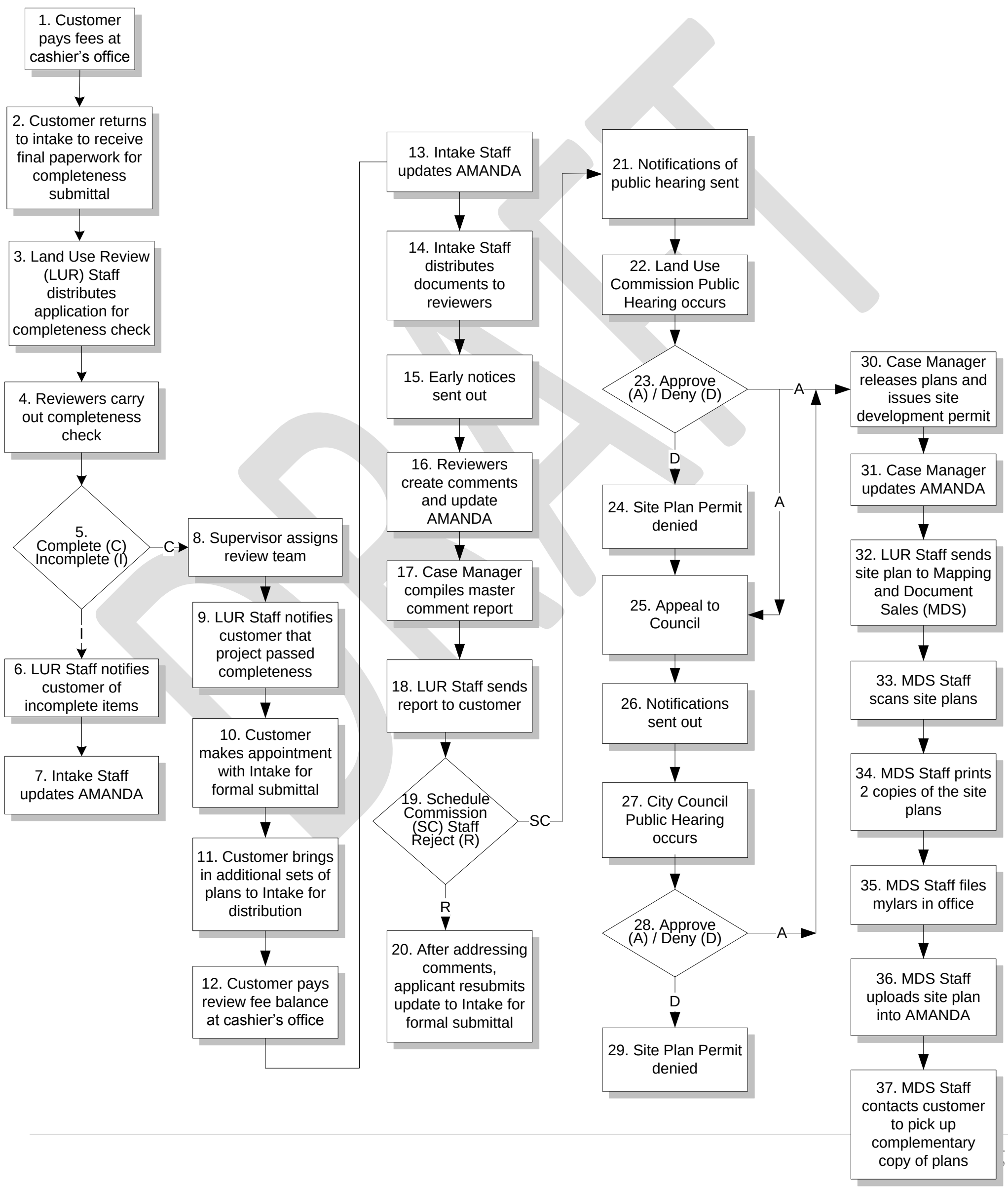
Figure __ below, is a very detailed flow chart, prepared by staff that outlines the steps in the Commission (e.g., Land Use Commission) Approved Site Plan process. The text below relate to the numbers in the boxes. Note that:

-

Comment [ZS150]: is this the planning commission?

Comment [MB151]: Yes

Figure 201
Commission Approved Site Plan Review



- This process only pertains to projects within the city limits. The applicant must submit a site plan for land use commission approval based upon criteria in the code. For example, a site plan proposing a conditional use would have to go to a land use commission for approval. If the project does not require land use commission approval, see Administrative Site Plan Review Flow Chart.
- There are two land use commissions: the Planning Commission and the Zoning and Platting Commission. The site plan is approved by the Planning Commission if it is located within an approved neighborhood plan, otherwise it is approved by the Zoning and Platting Commission.
- From the time of completeness submittal to the time of approval there is a code mandated 180 day update deadline. An applicant can request an extension of the update deadline, which may be granted for good cause at the director's discretion. In general, the process takes two to five months.
- A site plan application can be submitted concurrently with a commercial building review application.
- After the permit is issued, the customer has three years to complete the project. A one year extension can be granted administratively, otherwise the extension request must be approved by a land use commission.
- Site plan corrections (minor changes to the approved site plan) maybe submitted and approved through the Development Assistance Center (DAC). Site plan revisions (major changes to the approved site plan) must be approved through the process in this flow chart. For the distinction between "major" and "minor," see Land Development Code.

Comment [AG152]: See earlier comments on notes.

1. Intake Staff determines the type of site plan at this time. The customer must submit an HB 1704/Chapter 245 Determination Form at this time.

2. The Chapter 245 Completeness Check Team reviews all submittals requesting a determination from the Team. The Team meets two times each week. After the Team makes a determination, Intake Staff distributes the application for completeness check.

3. A $200 fee is due for the completeness check.

4. The completeness check team consists of reviewers from various disciplines, including: site plan, drainage, water quality, environmental, transportation, environmental resource management (ERM), floodplain, right of way management, utility coordination, traffic control, and Austin Water Utility (AWU). The reviewers collaborate on the completeness review to determine whether the application is acceptable for a formal submittal. Other division and department reviewers can indicate at this time that they require distribution at formal submittal. The completeness check team must respond regarding the project within 10 days or else the project is automatically accepted and any errors or omissions are handled during the review period.

5. Completeness is determined by the comments of the reviewers.

6. The applicant can submit any incomplete items to intake. The process continues from completeness submittal. The applicant has 45 days to complete the application for formal submittal. If the 45 days expires, the applicant must pay an additional $200 which will not be removed from the fee balance.

8. Each team consists of a case manager and site plan, drainage, water quality, environmental, transportation, and mapping reviewers. The review team may also include reviewers from other divisions or departments. The teams are assigned based upon current workload and case background.

9. Passed completeness form is sent to customer and includes total fees required at formal submittal.

10. Updates are submitted at this step. They do not require a second completeness check.

12. The review fees are determined by a fee schedule based on acreage and location. The $200 completeness check fee is deducted from total fees due.

15. Notifications Staff uses monthly-updated Travis County Appraisal District GIS data to generate a list of property owners to receive early notices. The Land Development Code (LDC) codifies who receives notices, including: property owners within a specified distance from the site plan property; the respective neighborhood group; and for some site plans, utility service addresses (typically a lessee).

16. Reviewers complete a detailed review of the site plan for items within their discipline. Collaboration occurs between reviewers. At this time, reviewers calculate construction inspection fees (paid to PW) and fiscal. The reviewers give Fiscal Surety staff cost estimates. See Fiscal Surety: Site Plans flow chart. The customer is notified of the fees and fiscal. All fees and fiscal must be paid prior to the approval of the site plan. Also at this time, the mapping reviewer populates their database to say that a site plan application is processed and does the addressing for the site.

17. The master comment report is due 28 days after the initial format submittal. Subsequent update reports are due 14 days after the formal submittal step.

18. LUR Staff sends master comment report to the applicant and interested parties who have registered with the case manager.

20. Usually the process requires 1-3 updates. The applicant returns to the formal submittal step each time a formal update is required. Updates are only distributed to reviewers that have not approved the project. The applicant submits informal updates directly to the case manager who distributes the update to the required reviewers.

21. The Case Manager schedules the site plan for a public hearing with a land use commission. Notices are sent according to LDC to surrounding property owners, neighborhood groups, interested parties, and in some cases, utility service addresses.

22. The commission votes and makes their determination at this time.

23. The project can be approved with or without conditions. If the project is approved without conditions, it continues directly to the case manager. If conditions are placed on the project, the applicant must resubmit the project to intake for formal submittal after addressing all the conditions.

25. The applicant or any registered interested party can appeal this decision to Council.

27. Council hears the case and votes to decide if the project is approved or denied. If a project is denied by council, there is no other step to be taken; the project cannot be competed. Council can approve the project with or without conditions. If the project is approved with conditions, the applicant must resubmit the project to intake for formal submittal after addressing all the conditions.

30. For site plans in the city limits, the case manager signs the site plan cover sheet and the site plan release block on all other sheets. For site plans in the City's ETJ, the case manager signs the cover sheet and stamps/initials all other sheets. It is the responsibility of the customer to apply for a building permit with the Commercial Building Review Division, if necessary. The customer must submit a copy of the site development permit and the approved plans when applying for the building permit.

31. The AMANDA site plan folder will indicate that the application is approved and released. An environmental inspection folder is created by AMANDA. The signed site development permit is scanned and attached in AMANDA.

33. MIDS Staff ensures that the set of mylars is ready for scanning and that the pages are in the correct order.

37. Second copy is for Environmental Inspection. See Environmental Inspections flow chart and/or Site Subdivision intake flow chart for continuation of this process.

The above flow charts are very detailed and helpful for internal training purposes, but too complex to be included in application packets to aid the public in understanding the processes.

58. ***Recommendation:*** **The Site Plan Review staff should simplify the "Commission Approved Site Plan Flow Chart" to show milestone steps and eliminate discussion boxes and include them as a visual aid in application packets to help users better understand the process.**

Comment [ZS153]: does the commission actually approve the flowchart? seems to me that should be a staff function.

Comment [MB154]: That is the name of the flow chart

Staffing

This function consists of 9 FTE's, including a Coordinator that administers the function and provides overall supervising and leadership. In addition, two Senior Planners have been designated as "Lead Planners" to provide day-to-day supervision of staff. According to staff the designated "Lead Planners" are supervisors in training. The span of control is workable.

Comment [AG155]: Subdivision Section Manager?

The Site Plan Review function manages the majority of the site plan application processes to ensure that proposed development complies with the Land Development Code, or the community standards established in Austin's Code of ordinances. There are some site plans (e.g., "D" Site Plans that pertain to infrastructure, such as Open Channel Drainage Detention Site Plans) that are managed by the Engineers to help manage workflow, rather than the use of contract staff.

Comment [ZS156]: I don't understand this paragraph

It was reported that this function is short staffed due to the increase in activity levels and that there is a need for 1 additional FTE Senior level Planner to help processes cases and even out workloads and 1 FTE entry level Planner I to assist with filing, case management and other administrative tasks.

Staff reported that caseloads vary by Planner, according to their scope of responsibility. For example, Lead Planners, that help mentor and manage other Planners on a day-to-day basis, carry a lighter caseload. In addition, Planners that are assigned as a liaison to a board/commission also carry a lighter caseload. We interviewed one case manager, whose primary responsibility is case processing and found that the planner had 70 active cases, which is a large caseload, given the complex code.

Activity data provided by staff shows that over 400 site plan reviews were completed each year, from 2009 to 2012. From 2012 to 2013, site plan review activity levels jumped up 21%, from 415 to 502, which equates to about 55 cases per planner in 2013.

Two, entry-level Planner I's assist senior-level planners with case management and administrative tasks, such as managing review comments and revisions, responding to public inquiries and interested parties, filing and phone calls. Management staff is currently working to ensure that the workloads for the Planner I staff is even distributed, so that Case Manager's receive as much support as possible.

Although a detailed staffing analysis was not performed for this Function, it appears that 1 additional FTE planner may currently be needed for case management and processing in this function to meet the increased work load demands. This is particularly critical given the extensive stakeholder comments and the need to shorten timelines..

59. ***Recommendation*****: Add 1 temporary planner to the site plan function.**

Typically, we recommend the use of outside consulting services help to handle spikes in development activity until such time that it can be shown that development activity can support the hiring of additional full-time staff. However, the City's complicated code makes it difficult to outsource projects, as the time required to train consulting staff makes such an option cost-prohibitive. However, it may be possible to add temporary administrative support staff to supplement permanent professional staffing.

60. ***Recommendation:*** **A staffing model should be developed for the Site Plan Review function based on labor hours to determine appropriate staffing levels for the function and staff the function accordingly.**

It is also likely that there is a backlog of cases for this function. Performance standards are not useful when there is a backlog. In Chapter __ we calculated that the current backlog for Site Plan review is 79 cases. This is a substantial number of backlog cases and contract staff, as recommended elsewhere in this report

Comment [AG157]: Incomplete sentence

61. ***Recommendation:*** **Hire contract staff to remove Site Plan backlog.**

62. ***Recommendation:*** **Managers and staff need to develop a strategy to remove the backlog. Given the complexity of the process it may not be possible to solve this by only using consultants.**

Comment [AG158]: Any thoughts on what this strategy might entail?

Technology

Technology for the Department as a whole is discussed under a separate chapter in this study. However, Site Plan Review function staff indicated that two primary technological issues hinder efficiency in the function, including:

- The Alternative Equivalent Compliance/DAC data is not integrated into AMANDA; and
- Case history layers in GIS are not linked to or integrated with AMANDA.

Comment [AG159]: Should recommendation 57 be placed here?

Training

Staff reported that additional Supervisor training needed for the Coordinator and designated "Lead" Planners to help improve communication and coordination and training skills. Manager and supervisor training is recommended for all of PDRD sections. In addition, despite the existence of fairly comprehensive training tools, staff indicated that they are left to "learn as they go," and that more comprehensive training is needed.

Staff also indicated that they need to regularly attend regional and national conferences on a rotating basis so that they are aware of emerging best practices, industry changes and trends. As noted in an earlier chapter, we commend that 2% of the personnel budget and 5% of the staff's time be available for training. Available training budget monies should be communicated to staff at the start of each fiscal year and allocated to staff members on a rotating basis.

63. ***Recommendation:*** **The Supervisor should conduct internal training sessions with "Lead" Planner and staff on Site Plan Review processes, related codes and research methods to raise competency levels and processing consistency.**

See our recommendations under the "Meetings/Communication/Teamwork" heading concerning devoting time on each meeting agenda to training

H. SUBDIVISIONS

The Subdivision process is shown in Figure 83. The types of cases for subdivisions include:

- Amended Plat
- Extension to Construction Plans (Managed by Engineers)
- Fair Notice
- Final Plat with Preliminary Plan
- Final Plat without a Preliminary Plan-Previously Unplatted, Replat, Resubdivision
- Managed Growth Agreement
- Preliminary Plan
- Plat Vacation
- Resubdivision
- Revised Preliminary Plan
- Revision to Construction Plans
- Revision to Construction Plan (Managed by Engineers)
- Rough Cut (Managed by Engineers)
- Subdivision Construction Plan (Managed by Engineers)
- ~~Withdraw and Resubmittal~~

Comment [MM[O160]: Not a formal application

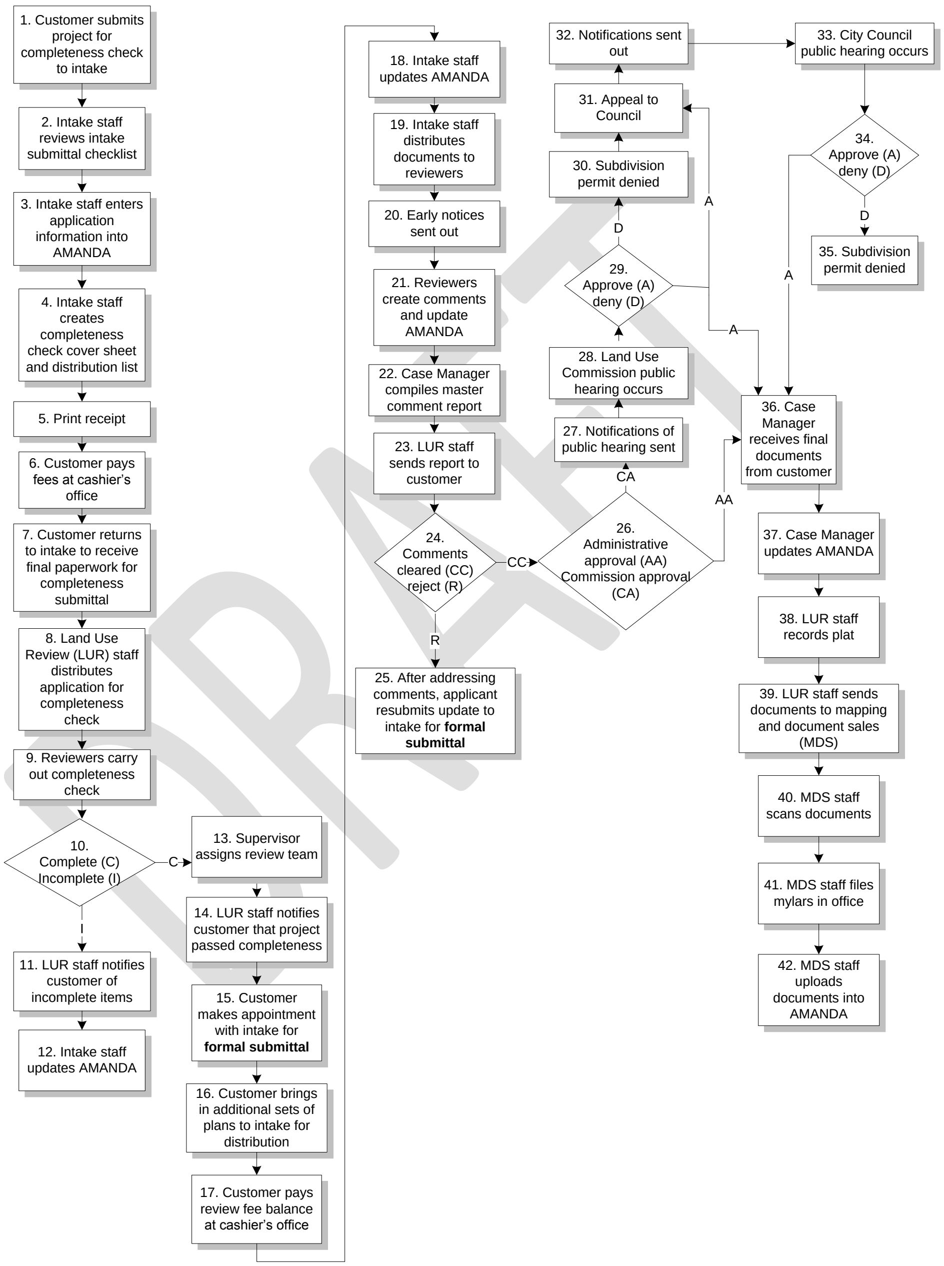
Both the Site Plan Review and Subdivision Review processes provide details about the steps involved in the approval process. In addition, we have detailed the Intake and Completeness Check Review processes above, so we will not detail each step in these processes as part of this discussion. Instead, we will summarize the issues that were identified during our investigation and provide recommendations to resolve those issues, below.

Also, see our recommendations under the "Administrative Approval Process," "Intake," "Completeness Review Check," and "Boards and Commissions," headings.

Staff created a flow chart of the Subdivision Review process is shown in Figure __. It provides a good overview of the process flow, however it needs to be updated.

64. *Recommendation:* The Subdivision Review staff should update the Subdivision Review process Flow chart to show the current steps involved in the review process.

Figure 83
Subdivision Review Process



- Subdivision applications include: preliminary plans, final plats, amended plats, resubdivisions, plat vacations, and subdivision construction plans.
- From the time of completeness submittal to the time of approval, there is a code mandated 180 day update deadline. An applicant can request an extension of the update deadline, which may be granted for good cause at the director's discretion. In general, the process takes two to five months.
- Subdivision applications can be submitted concurrently with each other (Preliminary Plans and Plat Application) and/or with site plans.
- Preliminary plans within the City must be finaled out within three to five years from the date of preliminary plan application depending on whether the property is in the water protection zone or desired development zone, respectively, with no extensions allowed. Preliminary plans in the City's ETJ must be finaled out within four to ten years from its date of approval depending on whether the property is in the water protection zone or desired development zone, respectively, with up to two two-year administrative extensions allowed. Subdivision construction plan permits expire three years from the date of issuance with one one-year administrative extension allowed.
- Subdivision construction plan corrections (minor changes to the approved plans) may be submitted and approved through the Development Assistance Center (DAC). Revisions (major changes to the approved plans) must be approved through the process in this flowchart. For the distinction between "major" and "minor," see Land Development Code.
- Exceptions for platting, also known as land status determination, can be requested and reviewed through DAC.

Comment [AG161]: See earlier comment on notes

2. Intake Staff determines the type of subdivision at this time. The customer must submit an HB 1704/Chapter 245 Determination Form at this time.
5. A $200 fee is due for the completeness check.
7. The Chapter 245 Completeness Check Team reviews all submittals requesting a determination from the Team. The Team meets two times each week. After the Team makes a determination, Intake Staff distributes the application for completeness check.
9. The completeness check team consists of reviewers from various disciplines, including: subdivision, drainage, water quality, environmental, transportation, environmental resource management (ERM), floodplain, right of way management, utility coordination, traffic control, and Austin Water Utility (AWU). The reviewers collaborate on the completeness review to determine whether the application is acceptable for a formal submittal. Other division and department reviewers can indicate at this time that they require distribution at formal submittal. The completeness check team must respond regarding the project within 10 days or else the project is automatically accepted and any errors or omissions are handled during the review period.
10. Completeness is determined by the comments of the reviewers.
11. The applicant can submit any incomplete items to intake. The process continues from completeness submittal. The applicant has 45 days to complete the application for formal submittal. If the 45 days expires, the applicant must pay an additional $200 which will not be removed from the fee balance.
13. Each team consists of a case manager and subdivision, drainage, water quality, environmental, transportation, and base mapping reviewers. The review team may also include reviewers from other divisions or departments. The teams are assigned based upon current workload and case background.

14. Passed completeness form is sent to customer and includes total fees required at formal submittal.
15. Updates are submitted at this step. They do not require a second completeness check.
17. The review fees are determined by a fee schedule based on acreage and location. The $200 completeness check fee is deducted from total fees due.
20. Early notices are required for Preliminary Plans (PP), major revisions to PP, final plats with variances, and resubdivisions. Notifications Staff uses monthly-updated Travis County Appraisal District GIS data to generate a list of property owners to receive early notices. The Land Development Code (LDC) codifies who receives notices, including: property owners within a specified distance from the subdivision property and the respective neighborhood group.
21. Reviewers complete a detailed review of the subdivision for items within their discipline. Collaboration occurs between reviewers. At this time, reviewers calculate construction inspection fees (paid to PW) and fiscal and notify fiscal surety staff (See Fiscal Surety: Subdivision Plans flow chart). The customer is notified of the fees and post fiscal. Also the base mapping reviewer completes the addressing for the subdivision.
22. The master comment report is due 28 days after the initial format submittal, except for preliminary plans, which depend on the size of the property. Subsequent update reports are due 14 days after the formal submittal step.
23. LUR Staff sends master comment report to the applicant and interested parties who have registered with the case manager.
25. Usually the process requires 1-3 updates. The applicant returns to the formal submittal step each time a formal update is required. Updates are only distributed to reviewers that have not approved the project. The applicant submits informal updates directly to the case manager who distributes the update to the required reviewers.
26. The director can administratively approve minor revisions to a preliminary plan, final plats and amended plats without a preliminary plan that are for four lots or less, some plat vacations, and subdivision construction plans.
27. The Case Manager schedules the subdivision for a public hearing with a land use commission. Notices are sent according to LDC to surrounding property owners, neighborhood groups, and interested parties.
28. The commission votes and makes their determination at this time.
29. If the subdivision meets all City regulations and Country and State Law, then the commission must approve the subdivision. If approved, the subdivision continues directly to the case manager.
31. The applicant or any registered interested party can appeal this decision to Council.
33. If the subdivision meets all City regulations and Country and State Law, then the commission must approve the subdivision. If approved, the subdivision continues directly to the case manager.
36. The customer submits one set of mylars for Preliminary Plans (PP) and final plats. One set of plans is required for subdivision construction plans. After the case manager signs the construction plans, the customer makes four full-seize and one half-size copy for the City. For PP, the case manager signs the preliminary subdivision release block on the cover and all other sheets. For final plats within the city limits, the Case Manager signs the plat. If the plat is within the City's ETJ, then the County also signs the plat. For subdivision construction plans, the Case Manager signs the cover sheet then stamps and initials subsequent sheets.
37. The AMANDA subdivision folder will indicate that the application is approved and released. For construction plans, an environmental inspection folder is created by AMANDA. The signed development permit is scanned and attached in AMANDA.
38. LUR Staff records plat by going to the County Clerk's office after the City receives all fiscal posting. The customer has until 90 days after approval to post fiscal.

40. MDS Staff ensures that the documents are ready for scanning and that the pages are in the correct order. All subdivisions are scanned, including those in the ETJ.

Equipment

Staff indicated that they generally have the equipment needed to perform work tasks, except for Adobe Reader software, and a drafting table to facilitate plan review. Since the city is actively moving towards electronic submittal and review, it may not be practical to purchase a drafting table. However, a drafting table may be available on an interim basis through surplus or from another function within the Division, Department or City, without the need for purchase.

65. ***Recommendation*: The Coordinator should confirm the need for a drafting table during the interim period of transitioning to electronic review.**

66. ***Recommendation*: The Coordinator should confirm the need for Adobe Reader software and budget for accordingly.**

Filing

This function still creates and utilizes paper files in addition to the electronic files created in AMANDA at submittal. Staff indicated that they will discontinue the creation and maintenance of paper files, once the City transitions to the electronic submittal system.

Meetings/Communication/Teamwork

A weekly, reoccurring staff meeting is held on Thursdays between the Coordinator and staff of this function to discuss and resolve case-related issues and relay Division and Department-wide information. In addition, a weekly, reoccurring staff meeting is held between, the Coordinator, function staff and county staff (e.g. Travis County) to discuss and resolve issues and coordinate reviews on projects within the ETJ areas of the City, which is good. We did not receive feedback from staff that additional meetings are needed within the function or across the division to improve coordination and communication.

Policies And Procedures Manual (PPM)

Staff indicated that a PPM for the function exists, however, it needs to be updated. Staff admits that activity volumes have prevented them from allocating time to update the Manual. Additionally, all of the staff members, except one, have been working in the function for at least 15 years are experts in navigating Subdivision Review codes and processes.

It was also reported that this function does not have clear policies regarding working from home (e.g., telecommuting). Staff indicated that Telecommuting is mandated by Council to help get employees off the roads at peak hours; however, staff feels that there is insufficient accountability for staff telecommuting so it is abused.

Feedback received from focus groups indicated that there have been customer service issues at times, with regard to communicating in a polite and timely manner. Staff indicated that they believe they generally provide good customer service, however service level standards are not clear and should be established to ensure consistent service delivery.

67. ***Recommendation*****: The Coordinator should update the Subdivision PPM so that it can be used as a training tool and reference guide and include clear policies on telecommuting, and customer service expectations including return phone and email policies.**

Staffing

This function consists of 5 FTE's, including a Coordinator that supervises staff. It is responsible for managing the Subdivision process to ensure consistency with the City's Comprehensive Plan, Subdivision ordinances and related codes. All of the staff, except one have been working in the function for over 15 years and are very proficient in processing subdivision cases. The Coordinator has 4 direct reports, which is a relatively low span of control, especially given the expertise of staff.

Data provided by staff indicates that subdivision review volumes have increased steadily over the last five years. From 2012 to 2013, the activity experienced its most significant increase from 267 to 315 annual reviews, which equates to an 18% increase.

Data provided by Subdivision Review staff indicated that this function is currently processing 155 active subdivision cases, which equates to almost 40 cases per senior planner per year, including the Coordinator, who carries a full caseload. In addition, some assistance/case support is provided by the Planner I's in the Site Plan Review function.

Despite the sustained increase in activity over the last 5 years, Staff indicated that they are able to complete their assigned work tasks and that no work backlogs exist, which is excellent. Data shows that 84.8% of initial reviews meet the performance standard. This is slightly below our recommended 90%.

Comment [ZS162]: I still hope to get data on backlogs.

Staff believes that the current inability to meet the 90% goal is more likely a caseload issue than a staffing issue. For example, caseloads are not always distributed evenly for many reasons, such as special projects/development teams, an on-going, phased project, a case manager's history with area, etc. As such, un-even workload distribution does occur at times, which can contribute to delays.

Additionally, we do not have data on performance standards for multiple reviews. Given the comments from stakeholders, improvement in this function is necessary. As such, we recommend supplementing staff by 1 temporary employee.

68. Recommendation: Increase staffing for subdivisions by one temporary employee.

Comment [MB163]: I disagree. Codes are too complex for a temporary to provide any real assistance for months. If you feel additional staff is needed, we need to delete the paragraph that follows and recommend a 1 FT planner, rather than a temporary.

Lacking additional data, there appears to be sufficient staff resources available to manage program activities at this time. Staffing resources should be reevaluated if organizational changes are implemented that affect the function and/or if activity levels significantly increase.

Technology

Staff reported the following technological issues in the function:

- Variance and waiver data base needs to be integrated into AMANDA; and
- AMANDA is not configured for reporting on activity levels.

69. *Recommendation*: Variance and waiver data bases should be integrated into the AMANDA system.

Training

Management Staff indicated that mini-training sessions/seminars are held with staff to improve code and processing proficiency, which is excellent. In addition, seminars are held commissions are other groups to raise their understanding of the City's complex subdivision procedures, codes and processes, which is also excellent. Earlier in this report, we recommended 2% of the personnel budget and 5% of employee time be available for training.

I. TREE PROCESS- ARBORIST/URBAN FORESTRY

The City Arborist/Urban Forestry Program is responsible for issuing tree permits on private residential & commercial properties in compliance with the Land Development Code. A Tree Ordinance Review Application and Permit is required to remove or to construct within close proximity of a protected size tree within the full or limited purpose city limits. On residential properties, a Tree Permit is required for the removal of or impact to any tree 60" in circumference and larger (measured at 4.5 feet above the ground). Trees smaller than 60 inches in circumference are not regulated. In addition, protected trees that are dead and/or hazardous also require a permit to be removed.

Commercial properties are required to show all trees 8” in diameter and larger on site plans that are submitted for development review.

In addition, a Tree Permit is required to remove a Heritage Tree. Tree Permits for Heritage Trees require the approval of a variance before a Tree Permit is issued. The Land Development Code outlines an Administrative Variance approval process as well as a discretionary Variance approval process that requires Land Use Commission approval. The Land Development Code outlines approval criteria for both variance processes. A damaged Heritage Tree can be removed without a permit under certain condition (e.g., damaged or imminent hazard to life, etc.).

The Tree Permit process for non-heritage trees is straightforward and generally works as listed in Table __.

Table
Tree Process

1. A customer applies for a permit by submitting a Tree Ordinance Review Application which is available online and fillable. The application form serves as both the application and permit, once approved, which is good. Applications can be faxed, emailed or submitted in person to either the Intake staff or City Arborist/Urb an Forestry staff.
2. The application is screened to ensure that it includes required information. Applications received by the Intake staff or City Arborist/Urban Forestry staff are input into AMANDA and forwarded to the Special Review/City Arborist function for review, inspection and issuance. A case number is assigned by AMANDA (e.g., ROW ID).

   City Arborist/Urban Forestry staff indicated that the Intake/data entry process to enter permits into AMANDA could be improved by adding drop down boxes in place of text fields to indicate tree species and size. They will be instituting these changes as part of the electronic submittal module for the Tree Permit process, which is good.

3. City Arborist/Urban Forestry staff indicated that due to the volume of permits (e.g., 150+ trees) it became necessary to have the Intake staff assist with receiving and screening permit applications and inputting cases into the AMANDA system. Staff acknowledges that receiving Permit Applications through various portals can be confusing for staff and applicants, and as such, it is a temporary process that will be replaced with a single portal, electronic process in the near future, which is good.

4. The permit is assigned by the Urban Forester to Special Review/City Arborist staff based upon urgency of the situation, workload, and geographic region.
5. Assigned staff conduct a site visit to confirm conditions. Staff indicated that each permit takes an average of 4 site visits in order to complete an initial tree/development assessment and repetitive inspections during construction. However, staff will accept photos of the tree(s), in certain cases, in lieu of conducting site visits(s), which helps them better manage staff resources, which is good.
6. Once site conditions are verified and all issues have been resolved, staff completes and signs the permit approval portion of the application. The customer must post the permit on-site while work is in progress and any conditions of approval must be met within 1 year of the effective date. Staff indicated that it is commonplace to extend the 1-year period as long as the project is being actively developed.
7. The signed permit is scanned and uploaded into AMANDA and serves as the case file, which is good. Permits are acted upon within 10-working days.

Given the straightforward nature of the above Tree Permit issuance process, it is an excellent candidate for electronic submittal, payment, review and issuance. Staff indicated that they are working with CMT and the AMANDA team to create a Tree Permit process module in AMANDA and that this process is slated as one of the first pilot programs to test the electronic permitting system, which is excellent.

Comment [AG164]: CTM

In addition to issuing Tree Permits and processing variances through the Land Use Commission for Heritage Tree removal, this function also provides input into all phases of development review process, from pre-development through construction. Staff has created workflow chart that summarizes the activities that staff engages in at each phase of the development review process, which is shown in Figure __.

Data Collection/Reporting

In conducting our review of the Special Review/City Arborist/Urban Forestry Program, we were able to immediately obtain all of the activity data that we requested, which is good. Staff continually collects and analyzes activity data and uses the data as a management tool to gauge resource needs and for reporting to the Urban Forestry Board and management team. However, data is collected, recorded and reported upon using spreadsheets, rather than the AMANDA system, which is less efficient.

70. ***Recommendation*: The City Arborist should work with CTM to configure AMANDA to collect activity data and generate monthly and annual reports.**

Filing

Staff indicated that email, e-files and paper files for stop work orders and court cases are kept at staff members' desks instead of in a secure central filing system, where they are accessible.

71. ***Recommendation:* The Program Manager should establish formal policies/procedures for file management.**

Job Descriptions/Titles

The need to update and review all PDRD job descriptions is discussed in an earlier part of this report. Like many functions within PDRD, this function uses job descriptions which do not adequately describe or capture job responsibilities in an effort to raise pay bands to attract more qualified individuals, which causes confusion about individual roles and responsibilities. For example, according to staff, the majority of the activities performed by the GIS Analyst position are not GIS-related. In addition, the Planner II position (recently transferred from the Intake/Notification function does not perform any planning functions as described in the Job Description and performs only basic administrative duties.

Meetings/Communication/Team Work

Staff meetings occur bi-weekly to ensure transparency, consistency, coordination, and effectiveness of practices, which is good. However, staff indicated a need for better communication and interaction with regard to department-wide issues, changes and strategies. Reoccurring meetings should have the following features:

- Have a defined purpose, an agenda, action items and summary notes that can be distributed electronically to all staff in advance of and following the meeting whether in attendance or not ;
- Include a scheduled time in each meeting to pass on information from management meetings concerning department wide issues and strategies; and
- At least 15 minutes of each reoccurring staff meeting should be set aside to educate staff about the roles and responsibilities of related disciplines within the Division and across the Department.

72. ***Recommendation:* All reoccurring meetings held for the tree function should include items listed above.**

Reception Area

The Special Review/City Arborist function has established daily walk-in hours, from 12:30-3:30pm to assist walk-in customers, which is good. A staff person from this function is assigned for each day of the week to provide assistance to walk-in customers, which is an excellent practice and one that we often see in place for best practice communities.

Comment [ZS165]: Why is it necessary to limit the hours?

Comment [PZ166]:

We received feedback that the reception services provided for fourth floor activities is not optimal, and as currently configured, serves to create an unnecessary layer between Intake staff and customers. Interviews indicated that reception staff currently perform only basic duties, which could either partially or fully be absorbed by Intake staff. Reception staff could then be repurposed to perform other routine "back-office" administrative duties.

Staff suggested that the reception area be reconfigured to accommodate Intake Staff so that Intake staff can also act as reception and serve customers at a customer-facing work station, rather than requiring customers to walk to the opposite end of the floor in order to meet with Intake staff at private work stations.

We observed the Fourth Floor reception area and confirmed the reception issues that were identified by staff and agree that the suggested option should be explored.

73. Recommendation: The City should consider reconfiguring the Fourth Floor reception area.

Staffing

This function consists of 8 FTE's, including a GIS Analyst (formerly temporary), a Planner II that was recently transferred in from another function, and a Program Manager that directly supervises staff. This function is responsible for numerous urban forest-related development activities issuing tree permits, review of conceptual site plans, development review, performing inspections and investigations of permitted land developments, construction sites and businesses to ensure compliance with environmental, tree engineering codes, ordinances and regulations and data collection, analysis and reporting on their activities. The Program Manager has 7 direct reports, which we consider an acceptable span of control.

It was reported that this function is short-staffed by one FTE administrative staff person. Data provided by staff indicates that Tree Permit volumes have generally increased over the last five years, except for 2013, when they decreased slightly from 2012 by about 3%. City data also shows that there has also been a significant increase in pre-development activity (e.g., meeting with homeowners, developers), development-review activities (e.g., Tree Ordinance, Heritage Tree, Board and Commission hearings, etc.) and inspections (e.g., compliance inspections, 311 calls, enforcement, etc.) over the last year. This increase in activity has generated more administrative work (e.g., answering phones, customer service, filing, etc.), which is largely being performed by non-administrative staff.

This function recently gained a Planner II position, which was transferred from the Intake/Notification function that performs limited reception and administrative tasks for the function (see our discussion under the "Job Description" heading about the need to review and adjust job descriptions and titles).

However, staff believes 1 additional Administrative FTE should still be added to the function to manage support activities more effectively. For example, staff indicated that they need administrative staff resources to assist with answering questions, scanning, posting, and forwarding inquiries to technical staff.

Staff indicated that they are able to complete their assigned work tasks and that no work backlogs exist, in that service levels are regularly adjusted to meet workload demands. In addition, organizational changes that are currently underway may result in other urban-forestry related staff from another department being merged with this function.

As such, there appears to be sufficient staff resources available to manage program activities at this time. Staffing resources should be reevaluated if organizational changes are implemented that affect the function and/or if activity levels significantly increase.

74. ***Recommendation:*** **The Program Manager should create a staffing model for the Special Review/City Arborist/Urban Forestry Function based on labor data to determine appropriate staffing levels for the function to justify the need for additional staff.**

Training

Staff in this function mentioned a need for additional training on negotiation, soil preparation, dealing with irate customers and general customer service. In addition, staff expressed a need for more comprehensive training on Outlook and AMANDA software programs to improve proficiency and general training on disciplines within the Division and across development-related Department functions to broaden their understanding of roles and responsibilities within the Division and Department. Finally, staff indicated that additional supervisory training is warranted in the function to improve leadership, decision-making and administration skills. Available training budget monies should be communicated to staff at the start of each fiscal year and allocated to staff members on a rotating basis. Earlier in this report we recommended that 2% of the personnel budget and 5% of employee time be available for training.

See our recommendations under the "Meetings/Communication/Teamwork" heading concerning devoting time on each meeting agenda to educate staff on the roles and responsibilities of related disciplines within the Division and across the Department.